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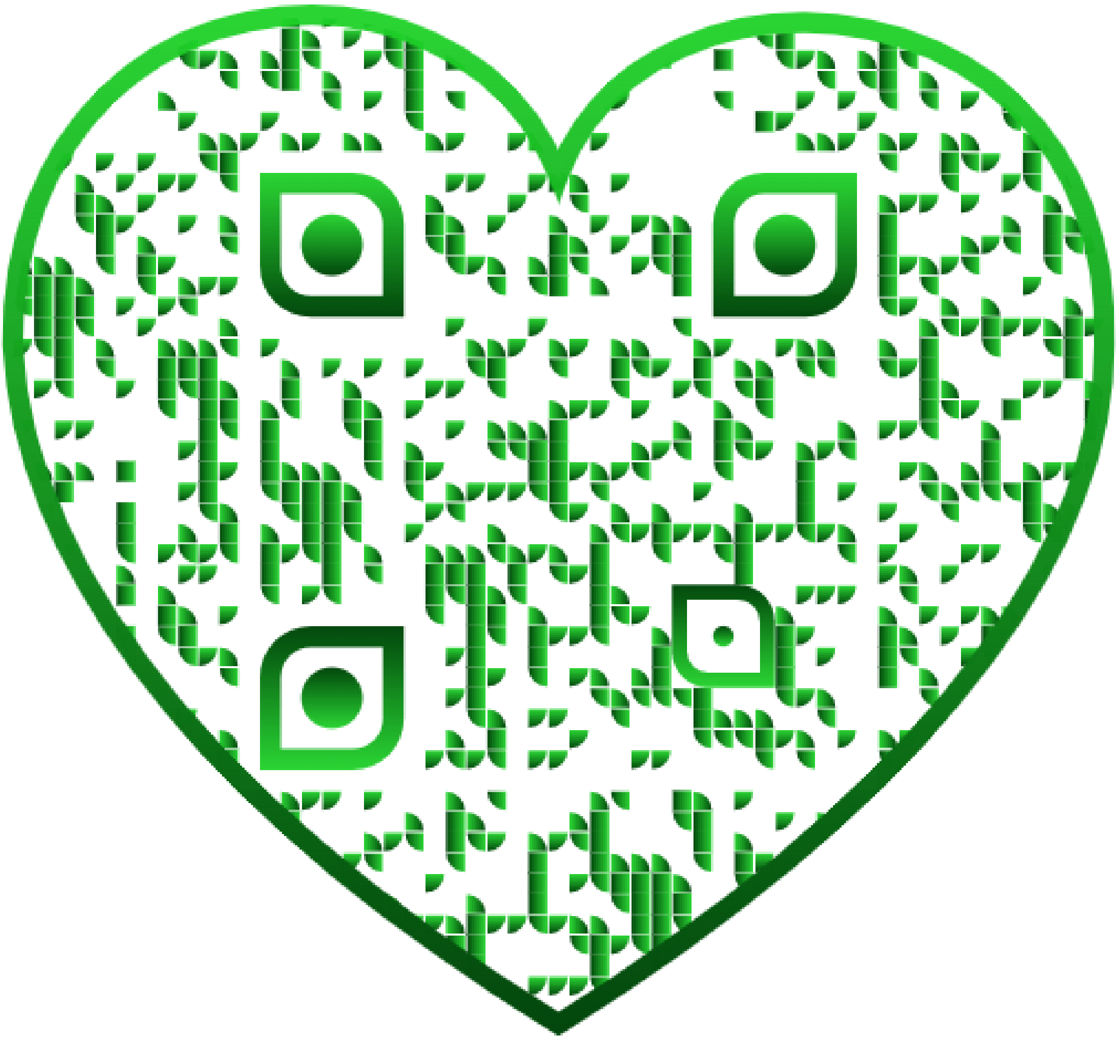

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THE ROOT NOTE

At the time of writing, we have just learned of Glen Campbell's passing. For such a legend, who even outsold The Beatles in 1968, I thought it paramount to begin with a mention. Sad news, indeed. RIP Glen!

Anyhow, on a positive note, we have an absolute corker of an issue lined-up. Our cover star this month is Carla Bruni. Part of the rich tapestry of rock 'n' roll history with (ahem) connections to Clapton and Jagger, Bruni has kept us captivated over the years. Now, after stepping down from the role as France's First Lady, Bruni is back doing what she truly loves – singing and playing guitar.

Acoustic also has a lengthy interview with the mighty Richard Thompson. With another album of acoustic classics about to hit the shelves, not to mention 50 years since the formation of Fairport Convention, it seemed the perfect chance to chat to a living legend.

Meanwhile, Joan Osborne talks tackling the songs of Bob Dylan, nomad songwriter Stu Larsen recounts the love story behind each of his Martin guitars, and rapidly-emerging country-soul talent Yola Carter tells of her meteoric rise, plus many more.

We have a real treat in the gear department too. After keeping things more wallet-friendly last time, we have some top-shelf material this issue. The new Martin 0-18 left us begging for more, the Yamaha A5R ARE rocked our world, and the beautiful Auden Julia had us drooling the moment it came out of the box. Poignantly, and totally coincidentally, *Acoustic* has reviewed Ovation's Glen Campbell reissue this month too. Is it a fitting tribute, though?

We also have a stunning Fender PM-2 Deluxe up for grabs this issue, worth £699. All you have do is complete our reader survey [see p12]. As editor, I'm keen to deliver a magazine that *you* want! Your feedback will be vital in achieving this. Furthermore, feel free to drop me a line anytime by emailing *dan.hobson@futurenet.com* – I'm keen to hear your thoughts and what you'd like to see.

And, as ever, we have the hottest tuition in town from certified masters of the trade, plus an introduction to some cracking new music, as well as a bit of history. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the issue!

Dan Hobson
Editor

www.acousticmagazine.com
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SUMMER NAMM – IN BRIEF

As usual, Summer NAMM yielded shedloads of gear news. Here's a round-up of some of the event headlines.

Martin revealed a whole host of new guitars. On display was a remastering of the iconic D-28, featuring Sitka spruce top, East Indian rosewood back and sides, vintage appointments and a new neck profile.

It also demoed the new Model America 1. The limited edition dreadnought, based on Martin's D-18, is built with woods entirely sourced from the USA. The guitar comprises: cherry neck; sycamore back and sides; black walnut fingerboard, head-plate and bridge; with Adirondack spruce top and bracing.

Next up was its new Custom Signature Edition D-18 RG, featuring artwork by Robert Goetzl. Built as a tribute to the Lakota Sioux tribe, the stunning guitar features Sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides, a single arrowhead inlay on the headplate, and four arrowheads on the fingerboard.

Dick Boak introduced his new Martin Custom Signature Edition dreadnought model. The D-Boak comprises Sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides, a modified low oval neck, as well as an ebony bridge and fingerboard. The top features 'Inside Out' artwork by Boak – representing Martin's internal X-bracing – and some of his original illustrations.

Taylor introduced several guitars at the event. The 352CE, a small-bodied, 12-string, grand-concert size guitar, with a shorter, 12-fret neck length. The guitar comes with Sitka spruce top and sapele back and sides. Taylor also demoed the 362CE, another 12-string with a solid mahogany top and Tazmanian blackwood on the back and sides.

Fender released new guitars in its Paramount Series and Classic Design range. The Classic Design includes new Nylon, Parlor, Bass, and Travel models, while the Paramount Series added the Paramount Travel (PM-TE) electro-acoustic model, based on a scaled-down auditorium shape, with an open-pore finish in all-solid mahogany or solid mahogany with a spruce top.

Gretsch proffered its new Limited Edition Jim Dandy 24" Scale Flat Top Guitar, a parlor-style model with rosewood fingerboard and bridge, 18 vintage-style frets, pearloid dot inlays, and a bronze-burst finish.

Yamaha unveiled the LJ16BC Billy Corgan Signature Model Jumbo, one of their new LJ guitars. Designed with the former Smashing Pumpkins frontman, the guitar features a solid Engelmann spruce top treated with Acoustic Resonance Enhancement. The back and sides are rosewood, and feature solid wood for the LJ16R and laminate for the LJ6R.

Epiphone also announced some new acoustics. The AJ-210CE, a dreadnought with select spruce top with classic cutaway, Shadow Performer Tuner Preamp and NanoFlex under saddle pickup system. The AJ-45 ME, a Masterbilt Series Advanced Jumbo with solid Sitka spruce top and solid mahogany back and sides. It also unveiled the Masterbilt DR-400MCE; and the Masterbilt De Luxe Classic 4-String electro-acoustic bass guitar, with a solid spruce top, ebony fretboard, and the eSonic and Shadow NanoFlex HD pickup system. They also demoed the Pro-1 Collection of guitars designed for beginners with lighter gauge strings, JumboPRO frets, a shorter scale length, and a dual-action truss rod. The Pro-1 also comes in a classical guitar style.

Saga showed its new Mini Jumbo guitars from its Blueridge line. The series comes in four models, including a cutaway, which features rosewood back and sides, solid spruce top and a mahogany neck.

Boss introduced the Rhythm Partner (which *Acoustic* will review next issue). The DR-01S is a virtual percussion machine designed for acoustic players, with organic sounds, including acoustic drum, congas, bongos, and more. Complete with foot-switch, users can layer patterns together in real time.

Peterson Tuners released the StroboClip HD, a high-definition clip-on strobe tuner that tunes with a resolution of .01 cent. The tuner works on any stringed instrument and features updated LCD tech, a true-strobe display, and over 50 tunings common to instruments like banjo, lap steel and mandolin.

Gator Cases introduced its new Journeyman Deluxe Wood Case for dreadnoughts. The GW-JM DREAD features heavy-duty plywood panels, crushed velvet interior, antique brass hardware, pebble weave burlap exterior and brown espresso trim.

For that finishing touch, **Levy's Leathers** displayed its new guitar straps, which included sublimation printed designs and garment leather ends, distressed flag, cotton and metal mesh straps – and of course leather designs. **More Summer NAMM news can be found at www.musicradar.com**

NEWTON NEWS

Almost a decade after his double platinum-selling debut, this month has seen the release of the sixth studio album by Newton Faulkner, *Hit The Ground Running*.

Of the title track (also a single), Newton says: "In the past I've mainly focused on pushing my guitar playing, but this time, I focussed on my voice. On the last few albums, there were quite a few co-writes but on this one my brother forced me to write mostly on my own. It's about messing things up but keeping moving forwards. I have experience in both."

Of the album, Newton says; "I started working with two principles in mind. One, I wanted it to be at its best performed solo live and two, to push my voice further than before. With the songwriting, I just wanted to do what I do naturally and not try and be clever, or follow any trends. The same went for the production. I feel like I've finally found my recorded sound."

This summer also sees Newton return to Boardmasters Festival, before a 32-date stint around the UK across October and November.

Info: www.newtonfaulkner.com

© Danny Clinch

YEAR OF THE CAT

Cat Stevens, aka Yusuf Islam, has released a new album this month – one that comes with a significant twist. *The Laughing Apple*, released under his Cat-O-Log Records logo through Decca Records, sees Stevens revisit some of his earliest material, presenting the songs as he has always wished they had been recorded. "Many of my earlier recordings were overcooked with big band arrangements," Islam explains. "They crowded the song out a lot of times."

To add to its authenticity, the album is co-produced by Paul Samwell-Smith, the original producer behind Islam's landmark recordings, including 1970's multi-platinum album *Tea for the Tillerman*, which contained the classics 'Wild World' and 'Father and Son'. Islam has also illustrated each of the 11 songs on the album, as part of the artwork package.

Info: www.catstevens.com

BUGG IS BACK

Jake Bugg will release new album *Hearts That Strain* on September 1. Recorded in Nashville, Bugg's fourth album sees the singer-songwriter make a spectacular return to his acoustic roots.

Working with Grammy-winning producers David Ferguson and Matt Sweeney, Bugg recorded the album with legendary musicians Gene Chrisman and Bobby Woods. As part of American Sound Studio's house band The Memphis Boys, Chrisman and Woods provided the chops on such pivotal records as 'Suspicious Minds' and 'Dark End Of The Street'.

"They're old guys but they're amazing," said Bugg. "It was ten to five and then that's it. They'd pack up and we'd done two or three tunes. It was a mad vibe being from England and meeting these absolute legends."

Bugg will be touring the UK in November. See next month's *Acoustic* for a full interview.

Info: www.jakebugg.com

© Nicholas Smale

TWIN GIANTS

Cambridge and Newport – two of the English-speaking world's most respected folk festivals – have formed a unique new transatlantic relationship.

A hub for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, Newport is known for having hosted the first major appearances of Joan Baez, James Taylor, Joni Mitchell and Arlo Guthrie, and sparked the revival of gospel, Cajun and blues. Further to that, Newport played an essential role in the forming of the Cambridge Folk Festival, which since 1965 has hosted legends such as Paul Simon, Shirley Collins and Christy Moore early in their careers.

Jay Sweet, Newport Folk Festival executive producer commented: "This move will allow us to share ideas, experiences and some artists from two festivals that have grown up together and in their own way played a role in shaping the folk music landscape on both sides of the Atlantic. This partnership will allow us to bring a little bit of Newport to Cambridge and vice versa."

Info: www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk

BILL COLLINGS RIP 1948-2017

Bill Collings, founder of Collings Guitars and respected luthier, has died, aged 68.

Collings was known for his vintage-inspired high-end acoustics, heading up the company for more than 40 years. A statement from Collings Guitars read: "We lost our dear friend and mentor Bill Collings yesterday. He was the amazingly creative force behind Collings Guitars for over 40 years. Through his unique and innate understanding of how things work, and how to make things work better, he set the bar in our industry and touched many lives in the process.

"Perhaps even more exceptional was his ability to teach and inspire. He created a quality-centered culture that will carry on to honor his life's work and legacy. He was loved by many and will be greatly missed."

GLEN CAMPBELL RIP 1936-2017

As this issue goes to press, we've just learned the sad news that Glen Campbell, the country singer-songwriter and guitarist, has died at the age of 81 after a six-year battle with Alzheimers. He is best known for singing on the classic hits 'By The Time I Get To Phoenix', 'Wichita Lineman' and 'Galveston'. Campbell also worked as a session musician as part of The Wrecking Crew, the acclaimed band of session musicians employed by producer Phil Spector. Campbell played on recordings by Bobby Darin, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Ricky Nelson, Dean Martin and Nat King Cole. He also played on the Beach Boys' classic *Pet Sounds* album.

Our review of Ovation Guitars' Signature Glen Campbell model can be found on page 50.

GREGG ALLMAN'S FINAL ALBUM

Gregg Allman's final studio album, *Southern Blood*, is out this month. The posthumous LP, Allman's first all-new recording since 2011's GRAMMY Award-nominated solo landmark, Low Country Blues, was produced at a time of ongoing health issues and has been described as "an emotionally expansive collection of songs written by friends and favorite artists including – meant to serve as a salutary farewell to his legion of devoted fans and admirers." Those friends and collaborators include Jackson Browne, Willie Dixon, Jerry Garcia & Robert Hunter, Lowell George and Spooner Oldham & Dan Penn – with one of the songs penned by Bob Dylan.

"Gregg was very excited to be in the studio," says Michael Lehman, Allman's former manager and friend. "He was especially thrilled to be recording this studio album with his solo band – he was so proud of them and loved the sound that they produced together. Gregg felt close to every single one of them. The Gregg Allman Band was like a family or a well oiled machine, always knowing what the other band members were thinking and doing."

Info: greggallman.com

CROPREDY MARKS FAIRPORT'S 50TH

Fairport's Cropredy Convention 2017 is on for an extra special celebration this month as it marks 50 years since the iconic band formed.

The sold-out Oxfordshire festival, held the weekend after *Acoustic* went to press, boasted a stellar line-up including Fairport Convention, Petula Clark, The Divine Comedy, Fairport's own Richard Thompson (interviewed on p24), The Trevor Horn Band, Douggie MacLean, Show of Hands, CC Smugglers, Cats In Space, and many more.

The schedule also promised an entertaining words and music dramatisation of Fairport's story, for true buffs.

While we couldn't get the Cropredy review into this already packed-to-the rafters edition of *Acoustic*, we certainly will be enjoying ourselves at this year's event. For full details see next month's *Acoustic*.

Info: www.fairportconvention.com

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The PM-2 Deluxe Natural offers legacy design elements of classic 60s models, including special checkerboard binding and rosettes, unique pickguard shape, as well as abalone and mother-of-pearl fretboard inlays. The Fender/Fishman® designed PM preamp system is specially voiced for the body shape, ensuring complete tonal control and variation. With thoughtful vintage appointments and the craftsmanship of a truly high-performing instrument, this truly is a fabulous prize.

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ASK THE EXPERTS

WHETHER YOUR MUSICAL OUTFIT IS A PROJECT BETWEEN FRIENDS OR A STONE-COLD BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP, THE MU EXPLAINS WHICH RIGHTS YOU NEED TO BE AWARE OF

In the excitement of recording for the first time, it's easy to forget one important factor: protecting your work. Whatever you're laying down, it's essential to safeguard the rights in the composition, recording, and performance, and to understand the difference between them.

PARTNERSHIP AND CO-WRITING FORMS

It's a good idea to have contracts in place with everyone you're collaborating with. The Musicians' Union (MU) Partnership Agreement is a good place to start. "It's important to establish key issues: whether you're performing as a band; who has written the music; and who will get the publishing rights," says MU assistant general secretary Naomi Pohl. "If that's going to be a negotiation, you probably need a partnership agreement or a co-writing agreement."

The MU Song Share Agreement, which can be used on a song-by-song basis, sets out a percentage for each person who has worked on the composition and/or lyrical content of the song. For two people co-writing, a 50/50 split is fairly standard. Sometimes one person has done most of the writing, in which case, a different split might be more appropriate, whatever percentage you mutually decide. The key is to decide beforehand to avoid nasty situations later.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

The MU has simplified the complex realm of copyright law by drawing up collective recording agreements with production companies and trade bodies such as the BPI. Naomi explains: "If you're recording for commercial release, you should be using a BPI/ MU agreement. That covers the major record labels and independent labels, but also works for an individual band or artist wanting to make a recording themselves and hire the session musicians." Promo video and TV backing track rights are also included in the BPI form.

Once the music is recorded, you need to register it with PPL and list all featured artists. You would also need to list the non-featured performers – session musicians, for example – who will get a smaller share of the PPL revenue.

WHO'S THE OWNER?

Before even starting to record, it's essential to make it clear who owns the final recording. MU sessions official, Pete Thoms, says: "If you're paying for the session, you are effectively the rights owner and the record label. So if you're hiring other musicians, you should probably go straight for the BPI/MU session agreement. If you're not registered as a record label, just put your name on the top, and that gives you the right to release that commercially.

This can be tricky when you're using a friend's studio, which they might be letting you use for free. In this case, it is wise to pay a token amount. "I would be really cautious about this," says Naomi. "You should pay a fee, even if it's only a nominal fee, frankly, to show that you are the person booking the studio and paying for that time. That makes it very clear, legally, that you own the recording. Plus, it's more professional."

Another scenario to consider is when you bring a song idea to a studio, and the engineer/ musician helps you record parts. Pete Thoms: "If you're expecting the engineer to flesh out your idea, you must have an agreement that makes it clear that the song is yours, and that whatever the studio or the engineer is contributing is simply an arrangement of your idea. Otherwise, you might end up in a situation where someone claims they helped you to write the song."

ASK THE UNION

Need tips on working this out? Our specialist officials in Regional Offices and dedicated Recording & Broadcasting team can help. For free basic advice and more on how to join the Musicians' Union, visit **theMU.org**. ■

YOLA CARTER

Yola Carter's unique take on soul/country music is earning her a dedicated international following after just 12 months. With tour dates around the world and a debut album written – Acoustic can reveal – it was high time we caught up

WORDS: DAN HOBSON

Yola Carter is an artist in demand. Since launching her solo career barely a year ago, she's been crowned UK Artist of the Year at the AMA UK Awards, played a much-hyped performance at AmericanaFest in Nashville, and recently jammed with Jools Holland on his Radio 2 Show. Her debut EP, *Orphan Offering*, wowed critics and audiences on both sides of the pond. What's more, the soul/country singer-songwriter managed all this without management to guide her.

"I did my first summer in 2016 and the reaction was just amazing," Carter explains. "Nobody really expects year one to kick off – but it did. I released my debut EP in November almost in response to the press from my live shows. I was planning to release in early 2017, but thought 'I'm not going to get the chance again'.

"When the EP came out I realised that there was a rush on the album – the second you release something you have to start writing the next. I was thinking 'ok, so this is going well, I'm going to have to hammer it out and get an album together. The more the hype gathered, the more I was like 'I've got to get an album out'." And we won't have to wait long, *Acoustic* can reveal. "The album is written," she confirms coyly. "The songs are demoed too."

While appearing like a dream-come-true, the quick success was not without its negatives. With no trusted management in place at the time of her meteoric rise, Carter was left alone in unchartered territory – right on the brink of something potentially huge. "When you have a lot of early success, there's obviously a drawback because you're playing catchup. I always thought the hype would die down and I would get some time to myself; some time to get management together. But the hype never died down. I can't complain, though," Carter chuckles.

Considering how seriously Carter takes her musical integrity, having the right management in place is extremely important at this stage of the game. "I create art," she says. "I write songs from a real place. It's really important early doors to make commercial arrangements that don't cheapen me further down the road. I'm not allergic to pop music, but any move towards pop music has to be right. If I'm ever making records for the accountant then something has gone very wrong."

Carter's music is best described as soul/country. Her voice is rich and soulful, beautiful yet powerful. The music, however, is firmly rooted in the country genre. "A lot of people think mixing country music and soul music is unusual, but that's only here in the UK. In the USA it's completely different. In the South especially, mixing soul and country is really common."

Regardless of unusual, Carter certainly is unique. Her attitude, stage presence, and songs all feel authentic and original. How did she arrive at the sound, though? "If, like me, you're born just outside of a city, in pretty much a white-bred small town, you're looking for role models that sound and look like you. As a very young child, I grew up with nothing like that. I ended up searching back in the decades to the 60s," she says.

"I was looking for music that spoke to me. The bands I got into as a teen helped me find where my voice belongs. My peers that looked like me sang R'n'B – there's no raspy vocals in R'n'B, though. So it became a journey of great self discovery. In my teens I had a lot of

friends who were older than me who had record collections that I could delve into. And I started to realise that soul singers did country records and country singers did soul records. The genres were intertwined."

Heavily influenced by 60s country, Stax-era soul and gospel ranging from The Staple Singers to Otis Redding, Carter was beginning to find her musical direction. However, early life was not always easy. Raised in a small seaside town in the South West, Carter's real-life story is both heartbreaking and inspirational. Coming from a poor, broken home and a parent suffering from mental illness who banned her from making any music, her experience of growing up was one of truly living below the breadline. In a working class community in denial of its status, where discrimination and even violence fuelled by racism were not unusual, writing music quickly became an outlet and a means of expression, and touring a means of escape.

Carter's story naturally finds its way into her music; she is unafraid to address difficult issues in her songs. "A lot of people don't ask me about the vulnerability behind my songs," she says. "There's this stereotype of the 'strong black woman'. Every soul singer from the 50s had the 'strong black woman' thing – but they were all in abusive relationships.

"It's essential for me in life – and songwriting – to have a percentage of vulnerability. In one way, it gives balance to my life; that vulnerability gives you a sense of strength. When I choose to be vulnerable I choose to be strong. It's essential to my life that I choose that balance. I write songs to give myself an easier time in life, both for me and everyone else. I have sacrificed myself in my music. I honestly think if it doesn't hurt – how much does it matter?

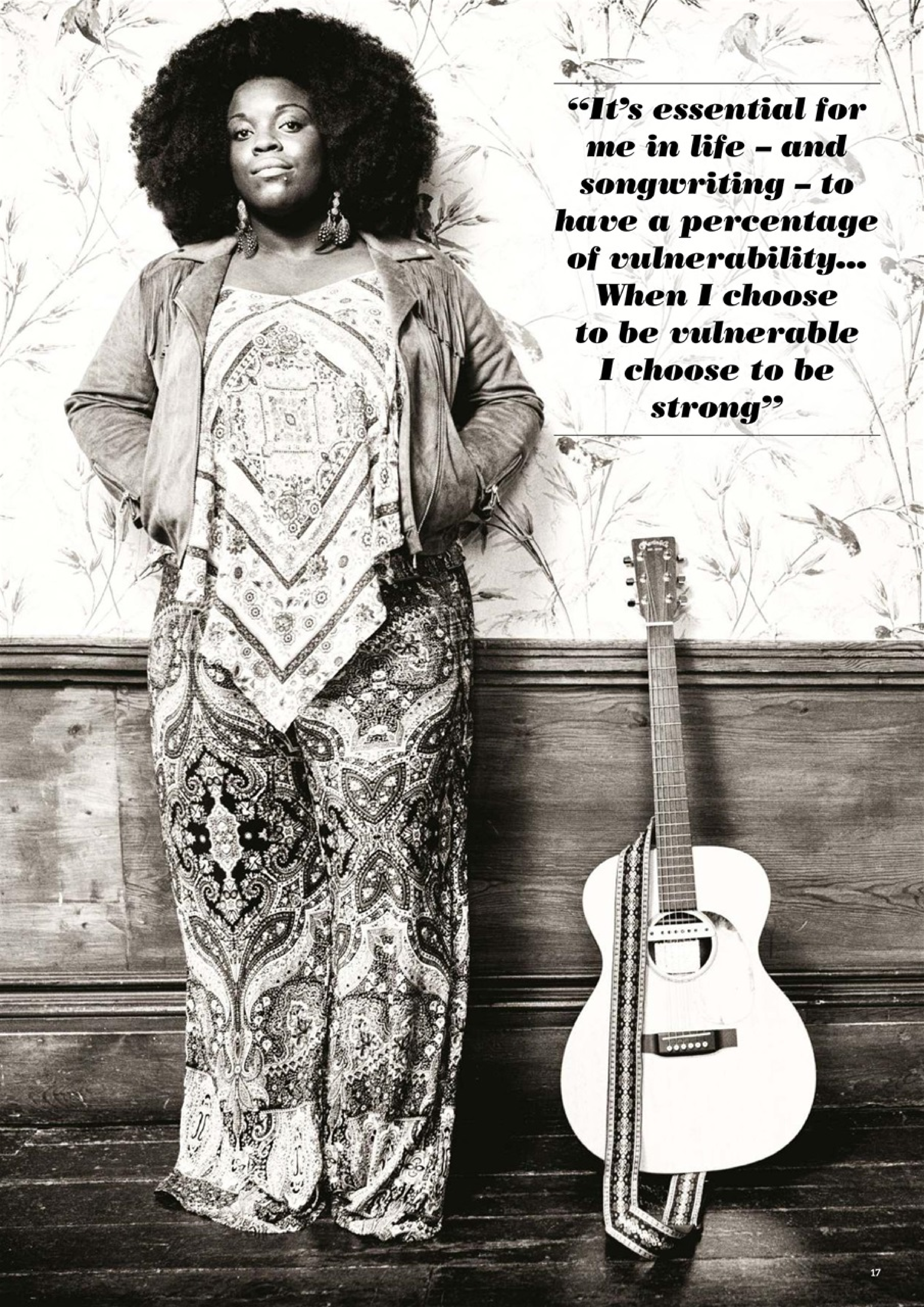
"I've had people coming up to me and saying 'I didn't realise I was in an abusive relationship until hearing that song'. Songwriting is liberating. It's cathartic and it's therapeutic and it means a lot that my songs help other people in hard situations."

Carter (born Yolanda Quartey) began touring internationally straight out of school with Bugz in the Attic. She later toured with Massive Attack, most notably headlining Glastonbury Festival's Other Stage to 60,000 people and broadcasting live on the BBC. Other notable supports and live collaborations since have included The McCrary Sisters, The Fairfield Four, Willie Watson, Jan Howard, James Brown, Elizabeth Cooke, and the legendary Stax Band.

Carter began her journey into Americana music performing with band Phantom Limb, in her hometown of Bristol. After self-releasing a debut album, they eventually disbanded, leaving Carter to focus on her own projects. Carter then combined her skills to write, record and produce her debut solo EP *Orphan Offering* – setting her on the road to fame.

The latest accolade in her already glittering career is appearing as the special guest on Jools Holland's Radio 2 show in June. "It was awesome," Carter enthuses. "I met Jools at the Americana Awards before I was due to perform. I said 'we're going to be on the show' and he was really pleased. We did the live session in his studio in London and it was just the most easy going thing. It was a great jam, Jools was really into the music – his band are off the chain. We played live and got on really well, I don't think this will be the last time Jools and I play together." ■

***Orphan Offering* EP is available now.**
Info: www.yolacarter.com



"It's essential for me in life – and songwriting – to have a percentage of vulnerability... When I choose to be vulnerable I choose to be strong"

TWO WAYS HOME

An Anglo-Austrian alt-country duo with decidedly American sensibilities? There's no two ways about it: this is a musical outfit whose sound knows no borders...

Two years after the release of debut EP *Better Days*, alt-country duo Two Ways Home have returned with four-track EP *Closest Stranger*. The duo, Isabella Mariee (originally from Vienna) and Lewis Fowler (from Gloucestershire), returned to Nashville to develop their songwriting and master the EP.

Since their first release, the pair have enjoyed extensive radio play across the UK and Europe, and have performed with some of country music's most influential musicians, from Phil Vassar to Red Sky July.

How long have you been playing together?
Fowler: We met at university when I started playing in Isi's pop/rock covers band. We had about two gigs before the band fell apart and we started jamming together and writing songs, playing a few open mic nights trying out that material . After friends repeatedly told us we sounded a little country, we took a trip to Nashville to see what the scene was like over there. We fell in love with the sound and have been back many times since, honing our sound along the way.

How would you describe your sound?
Mariee: I always say its alt-country but really there are so many hidden influences that pull us in several different directions. We try to just write without conforming to any genre or style and as we both grew up listening to quite a wide variety, we hope we are building our own sound as we go. I think we try and capture the more folkier/British sound of Mumford and Sons, mixed with male-female harmonies and instrumentation, which perhaps leans more in the direction of Lady Antebellum.

What can we expect from *Closest Stranger* EP?
Fowler: This is the first EP we have released that has co-writes with other artists, so you can hope for a similar sound to our previous EPs but some songs will be pushed in a slightly different direction. This is probably the most country sounding EP we've produced with two songs co-written with American artists. It was also mixed and mastered in Nashville, which obviously goes a long way into influencing the overall sound.

Are you happy with how the EP has ultimately turned out?
Mariee: We really are. Often you produce something, whether it's an EP or album and you feel like you were restrained in someway, whether it was by the people in your team, lack of time/preparation or as is often the case, budget! However, with this EP, we were lucky to work with some amazing people at every stage of the production and are super happy with the end result.

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You visited Nashville to master the EP. How did you find life there?
Fowler: This was our third trip and by now we've made a lot of friends. We were only there for a week but we managed to play two shows, have three co-writes, finalise some tracks with our producer and very importantly hang out. Nashville is one of the most friendly places we've been to and we've always found it easy to explore and meet new people.

Will you be visiting again?
Mariee : Definitely! We're already planning our next trip, which will no doubt include some writing sessions for our next release.

What are your plans for the rest of the year?
Mariee: We have loads of shows over the summer as a duo, trio and full band! We are very excited to get on the road, play some festivals and get our new material out there.

How did you first get into playing the guitar?
Fowler: I started playing guitar at about 10 with an old half-sized classical guitar, which my dad strategically placed around the house. He is a guitarist and a singer, who taught me my first chords and solos and I grew up listening to him playing shows. I then moved on to an electric guitar and began playing in a few rock bands with school friends. We peaked with the opening slot at a festival called The Shipston Proms in front of about 2,000 people and from then on I had a passion for live performance.

Around that time I saved up all the money I possibly could and with a bit of help from my dad bought a Gibson SG Standard (I was and still am a huge AC/DC fan!).

Since then I have also really worked on my acoustic playing, which I mainly play in Two Ways Home.
Mariee: I have only started playing guitar more recently, with Lewis showing me a few chords and learning to play and sing some songs. I have been playing ukulele for about six years now and I try to play it as creatively as possible, often playing picking parts and lead lines in our songs. Mandolin is a fairly new acquisition and I am just getting to grips with the instrument but it has been great to play it on the new EP, especially with my little solo sections in 'Push and Pull'.

Who were your early musical influences?
Mariee: I listened to a lot of Michael Jackson, Prince, Mariah Carey and a lot of Motown around the house when I was growing up.
Fowler: I grew up in quite a musical household, there was always music coming from somewhere. We listened to a lot of rock: Queen, Led Zeppelin, The Eagles, The Beatles but I can also remember going through my dad's record collection very regularly. A vinyl that I particularly remember was a 7" single of 'Stray Cat Strut' by the Stray Cats and there was something about the groove of that song and Brian Setzer's guitar playing that had me transfixed. It was one of the first solos I learnt to play and I can remember it taking a little while to get it to sound right.

> **"My trusty Takamine EF-300 is an indestructible workhorse of a guitar"**

Who inspires you these days?
Mariee: We both really love the Brothers Osborne, Lady Antebellum and Lucie Silvas at the moment.

Can you tell us about your live setup?
Fowler: If we play as a duo, I use a stomp box and my trusty Takamine EF-300. It's an indestructible workhorse of a guitar but it sounds great. I've had it about eight years and I'm struggling to find anything I like as much.
Mariee: I play myriad instruments but at the moment I'm playing a Kala KA-JTE tenor ukulele, which sounds great plugged in. I also use an Oscar Schmidt Autoharp, which really pads out our on-stage sound, especially coupled with my Strymon Mobius [modulation pedal]. I have also just started playing mandolin and am currently in the market for an upgrade. I've got my eye on an Eastman, I absolutely love the sound of their instruments.
Fowler: When we play full band shows we also have drums, bass and electric guitars. Our electric guitarists has a great collection, usually using a Telecaster or a PRS through a plethora of pedals into a Carr amp. Clancy definitely knows his tone!

How about in your personal collection?
Fowler: Well, in Two Ways Home I tend to play my Takamine EF-300, mainly for the live shows, but I also have my red Gibson SG (Angus Young Style!), an Epiphone 335 and an American Fender Stratocaster, which is my go-to electric now.
Mariee: I've built up a collection of my own over the last few years. Guitarwise I have a Taylor 114ce, which I bought two years back to learn on. I also have two Lanikai soprano ukuleles, which are great for the studio and I'm looking into buying a Gretsch electric guitar as I love the look and sound of the bigger hollow-body models.

What's your songwriting process?
Mariee: Our songwriting process differs greatly from song to song. Some songs are borne out of a riff on the guitar or ukulele that we can't get out of our heads. More often than not, we start with a concept or a sentence and then work out what the meaning or message behind the song could be. If we are in a co-writing session I will often focus more on the melody of the song and Lewis often works more on the lyrics but some of our favourite songs that we've written have come about in a total different way entirely. ■

***Closest Stranger* EP is out now.**
Info: www.twowayshome.com

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WILDWOOD KIN

Family outfit Wildwood Kin are creating a serious buzz. Acoustic took the opportunity for a chat before the trio are swept into the ranks of superstardom

Wildwood Kin are an Anglo/Americana trio from Exeter, in Devon, comprising sisters Beth and Emillie Key, on bouzouki and guitar alongside their cousin, Meghann Loney on drums. In 2015 the girls were shortlisted for a BBC Folk Award and in 2016 their debut single 'Warrior Daughter' spent several weeks on the Radio 2 playlist. Their tracks have notched several million streams on Spotify too. Having recently signed to the re-launched Sony imprint Silvertone, the girls have just released their much-anticipated debut album *Turning Tides*. The extraordinary debut boasts inventive sonics and spectral atmospherics alongside their sublime three-part harmonies.

After winning The Bob Harris Emerging Artist Award earlier this year, the sisters have continued to wow crowds on some of the biggest stages of the summer. With a full UK tour coming soon, as well as a trip to Nashville on the cards, it looks like big things are happening for the talented trio.

Acoustic caught up with the sisters ahead of soundcheck to find out about the secret to their success.

Where are you now and what are you up to?
Emillie: We are just outside The Islington, in a park in London. We've just loaded in and are waiting for sound-check.

What can we expect from the debut album?
Meg: It's quite eclectic. We've had the opportunity to explore a lot more genres and instruments than we've had before. Our producer Jamie Evans really encouraged us to think outside the box. We've got some tracks rooted in our folkier background, then we've got other tracks exploring blues, rock, even some electronica and ambient sounds. It's an interesting mix and we're really excited to share it.

How long did it take to record?
Beth: We started recording the album in April 2016. We had done a lot of pre-production beforehand with our producer, some in Grantham, some in Belgium. We recorded half of the album at a studio called Westpoints, in Shepherds Bush, and half of it in a little studio near to where we grew up called Middle Farm Studios. Which was really cool, in the middle of nowhere, with log burners. It was a great experience.

You picked up a lot of support from your first EP, including being put on the Radio 2 playlist. Is there a feeling in the band that this new album could be the one for you?
Emillie: On the run up to the album, we have been given a lot of great opportunities and platforms that have really helped us build a fanbase. We've had some great support slots and radio play. BBC radio, especially, have supported us massively. We feel really privileged and blessed. Whatever happens with the album, we're really glad that we've had the opportunity to share this part of our musical journey with everybody.

Obviously you grew up together, but how did you first start playing together?
Meg: We've been singing together since we were very young, it's always been very natural. We come from a musical family, so that was a massive part of our upbringing. The actual band started in about 2012. I was around 19 and was about to do an internship in the States, which didn't work out. Emily was just finishing her A Levels and Beth was finishing her GCSEs. We all felt like we wanted to take a gap year, do something fun, and learn something about ourselves. We thought music would be a cool way to do it – we certainly didn't expect that it would turn into a full-time job for us. As soon as we started gigging and playing, though, a lot of doors just opened for us. We were taken aback by the response. It was very humbling.

(L-r): Emillie Key, Meghann Loneyand Beth Key

How does it work being family on the road, then? Is it always a positive thing?
Beth: I think it's a positive thing, being with each other all the time. We go through so much together, if we weren't family it would be a bit more stressful because we wouldn't be able to be ourselves all the time. As it's family, we can be ourselves.

How do the tunes come about?
Emillie: Each time we start a song has been quite different really. We don't really go about it in any one way, we just see what comes about. The songs can start from a riff, melody, a singing pattern – whatever.

So, it really is a three-way operation?
Emillie: Definitely. And lyrically too. We all try to make sure we're on the same page and feel where our hearts are at.

What themes and subjects are you exploring on the new record?
Meg: A massive part of our songwriting is our faith. We are Christians so that element of spirituality comes into our songwriting a lot. You write about what means a lot to you, so just naturally, that is a big theme. Whether people have faith or not, we have a real core aim of writing about things that bring hope and inspire people. We have a positive message and it's really important. We want people to listen to our songs and get peace and joy in their day.

"The Faith Eclipse has been the most, well, faithful"

Emillie, what guitars are you using in the stage show?
I use a Faith Eclipse series acoustic guitar. Faith kindly endorsed me last year. I tried a lot of guitars in the past, but had feedback issues among other things. So it's great that this guitar has been the most, well, faithful. Fender recently endorsed me too, so I've got an American Stratocaster Pro, which I use onstage sometimes and absolutely love.

What are your musical influences?
Meg: At the time when we started out there was a real alternative folk revival going on with Mumford and Sons, Fleet Foxes, Noah and the Whale; all of these bands that had gone back to that organic sound and made it really relevant. We took a lot of inspiration from that. We grew up listening to James Taylor, Fleetwood Mac, Simon and Garfunkel, but also people like Stevie Wonder, The Police, stuff like that. It has always been varied.

You played Glastonbury recently...
Emillie: Yeah, we played the Avalon Stage and on the BBC Introducing stage which went live on TV, which was pretty scary but amazing!

And aside from taking a little break in September, you are pretty much solid touring for the rest of the year now, right?
Beth: Yes, definitely. Straight after the release we are going on a radio tour and then we are straight into the album tour, all around the UK. We are doing the Radio 2 at Hyde Park, then straight after that we are going over to Nashville for the Americana Awards with Bob Harris [Radio 2 presenter].
Meg: He's taking us to showcase our music in Nashville. It'll be our first time over there, so we are really excited. ■

Turning Tides **is out now.**
Info: https://wildwoodkin.com

RICHARD THOMPSON

When it comes to legends, you struggle to find somebody more worthy of the status than Richard Thompson. 50 years since he co-founded the groundbreaking Fairport Convention the certified master has a new acoustic album just out – what better time for a chat?

WORDS: DAN HOBSON **PHOTOS:** DAVID KAPTEIN

Richard Thompson is undoubtedly one of the greatest guitarists of all time. After essentially inventing British Folk Rock with the legendary Fairport Convention, Thompson is regarded as one of the world's most critically acclaimed and prolific songwriters in history. Thompson's jaw-dropping body of work includes over 40 albums, many Grammy nominations and numerous soundtracks. Myriad artists have recorded his songs over the years: Elvis Costello, REM, Del McCoury, Bonnie Raitt, Patty Lovelace, Los Lobos, Tom Jones, David Byrne, Don Henley, and Robert Earl Keen, to name a few.

Thompson, often dubbed the English Bob Dylan, has received Lifetime Achievement Awards for songwriting on both sides of the Atlantic; from the Americana Music Association in Nashville, the BBC Awards, as well as the prestigious Ivor Novello. He even received an OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 2011 – personally bestowed upon him by Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace.

Having co-founded Fairport Convention in 1967, aged 18, Thompson was the driving force in getting the band to write their own songs. After learning the craft, Thompson was soon Fairport's main writer; quickly earning a reputation as a master of the trade. The influence of those Fairport Convention songs continues to this day, and the band are adored as much now as they ever were.

In 1971, Thompson left Fairport and initially played guitar on British folk-rock albums. He teamed-up with Fairport and folkie veterans, including drummer Dave Mattacks, singer Sandy Denny, and bassist Ashley Hutchings under the name The Bunch to record *Rock On.* A friend of Denny's, Linda Peters, sang on that album. She married Thompson soon afterward.

After the marriage, Thompson began a decade-long musical partnership with his then-wife Linda. In 1974 the pair converted to Sufism and, following a UK tour, retreated to the English countryside to start a Sufi community. They returned in 1978 with First Light. After the marriage broke down, Thompson began a glittering solo career, which continues to this day. He has performed for over 30 years as a highly successful artist, who tours both solo acoustic and with his electric trio.

> **"There's dogs barking and planes going over, but that aside, Classics II's a great recording"**

The past two years saw Richard Thompson headlining dates around the world as well as co-headlining shows with Emmylou Harris and Rodney Crowell as well as the Americanarama Tour, with Bob Dylan, Wilco, and My Morning Jacket. This culminated with Dylan himself covering Thompson's classic song '1952 Vincent Black Lightning'.

Thompson's genre defying mastery of both acoustic and electric guitar continue to earn him massive new fans and a place as one of the most distinctive virtuosos in folk rock history.

With 2017 being the 50th anniversary since Fairport Convention was formed, and with *Acoustic Classics II* just out, we thought it was high-time we caught up with this genuine, bona fide legend.

Where are you now and what are you up to?
Err… where am I? I'm in New Jersey [laughs] just getting ready for an acoustic guitar and songwriting camp up near Woodstock, New York, called Frets and Refrains.

So, *Acoustic Classics II* is just out. What can we expect from the album?
On Acoustic Classics I, I re-recorded songs that were very popular from the catalogue, some of which had been recorded on electric, some of them were quite old, and it felt like a good time to revive them. That album was very popular, so this one is more of the same thing.

Where was the album recorded?
I did it at home, in my garage. I have a small studio at home. It's just a little setup, but I've got nice mics and it sounds quite good.

We reviewed it in the last issue of *Acoustic* and thought it was brilliant.
Oh, fantastic. Just occasionally there's things like dogs barking and planes going over on it, but apart from that, I do think it is a great recording [laughs].

Fairport Convention, backstage at Top of the Pops in 1969

Are you planning to release any more records in the near future?
There is an album that's coming out called *Acoustic Rarities*, which will be an album of previously unrecorded songs. In some cases, my first performance of a song that may have been written by somebody else. Stuff like that, odds and ends. It'll be an interesting record.

Will that be out later this year, then?
Yeah, I think so.

You're regarded by many as one of the best guitar players of all time, both on electric and acoustic. Which of them do you prefer playing, though?
[Laughs] Personally, I refute those claims. I really enjoy the fact that I play acoustic and switch to electric. It's two completely different things and in some ways hard to compare. With acoustic guitars I'm usually playing solo, so I have to cover more bases. Acoustic is a more full-on way of playing, rather than electric with the band, where I'm just playing single lines and solo.

You've been hailed as one of the greatest songwriters of all time; I think the *LA Times* said you were the best since Dylan…
[Laughs] I might argue with that one as well!

Tell us about the songwriting process for you.
It's very hard to analyse the process. In terms of what you write about, sometimes songs are based on something quite specific in your life and you try and get that across faithfully. Other times, songs can really just be stories; things that you conjure up out of your imagination. But then sometimes you realise that the fictional ones are usually about you in the end anyway.

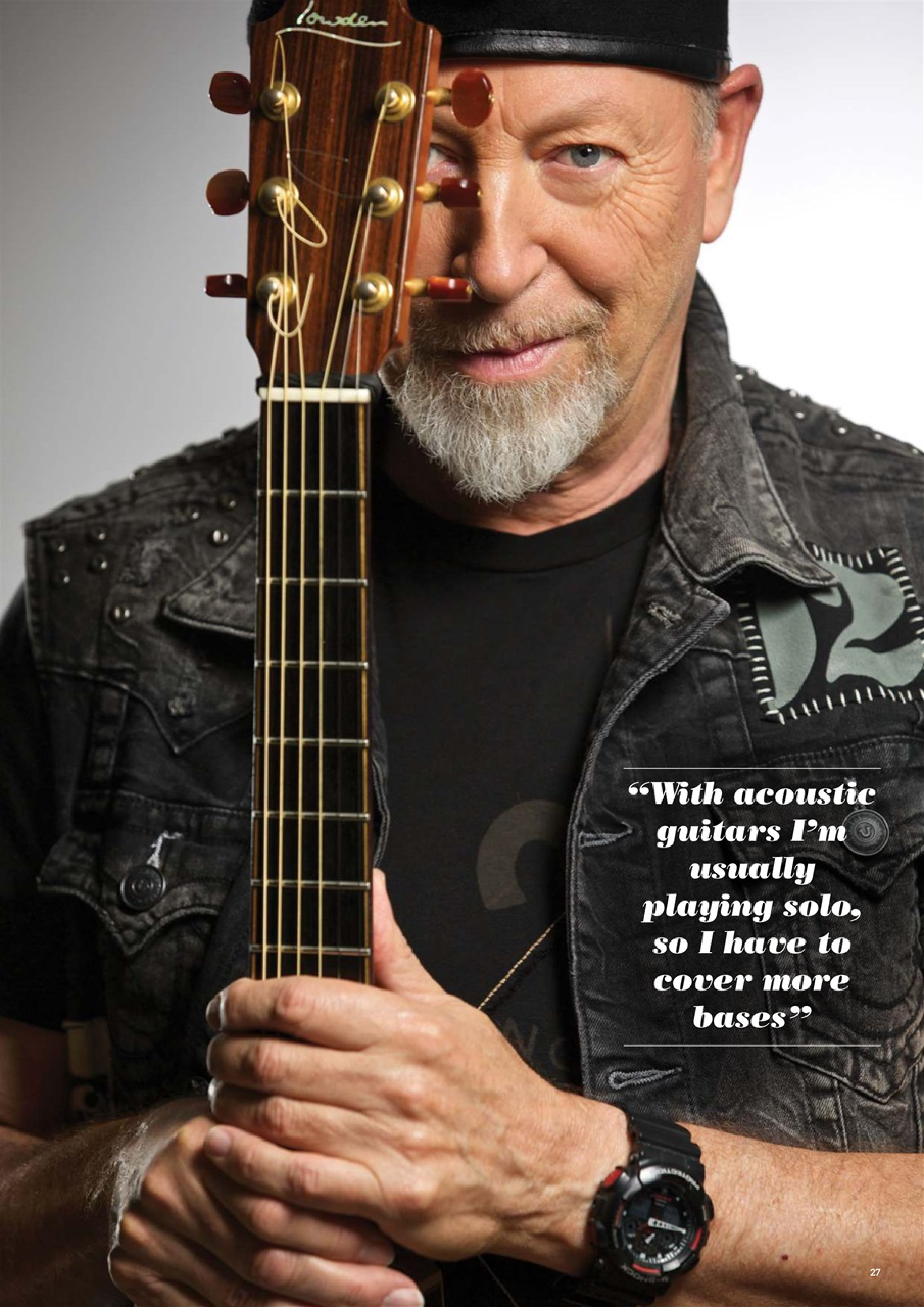
Interesting! Do you set time aside to write or do you just try and capture flashes of inspiration when they come?
I really try to work at it. If you wait around for lightening to strike, you can wait for a long time. So I do work at it and I do try to set time aside when I'm on the road to have writing bursts, you know, and I try to keep a notebook with me all the time so as I'm travelling I can jot ideas down.

It's 50 years since Fairport Convention was formed. Has the time flown by?
It's scary – 50 years is ridiculous! I've thought a few times that it was all over and we'd all want to retire. But here we are, still going. I'm proud of the band, I think it was groundbreaking and some of the records that we made have stood the test of time. It will be a good celebration at Cropredy in August and it'll be nice to see everybody and to celebrate this monumental anniversary together.

Since leaving Fairport at 21 years old, you've had a very long and prolific career. If you had to choose just one highlight, could you do it? And if so, what would it be?
Oooh, tricky. Hmmm… Well I did a festival a couple of years ago with Bob Dylan and he played one of my songs and I thought that was pretty much a highlight.

You've had quite a few awards for your music over the years too, including an OBE in 2011. Which award are you most proud of, and why?
Gosh, I don't know. All awards are like a pat on the back. As an artist you need a small amount of praise. Just enough to say 'well done, carry on'. Being critiqued isn't necessarily the truth, but being praised isn't either. I really don't live my life by awards. I try to have my own idea of the value of what I'm doing.

How did you first get into playing the guitar?
I always wanted a guitar, from about the age of five. Probably from about Elvis' time, I thought that was just fantastic. The guitar was just the cool thing to have, you know, the cool thing to play – the cool thing to pose with



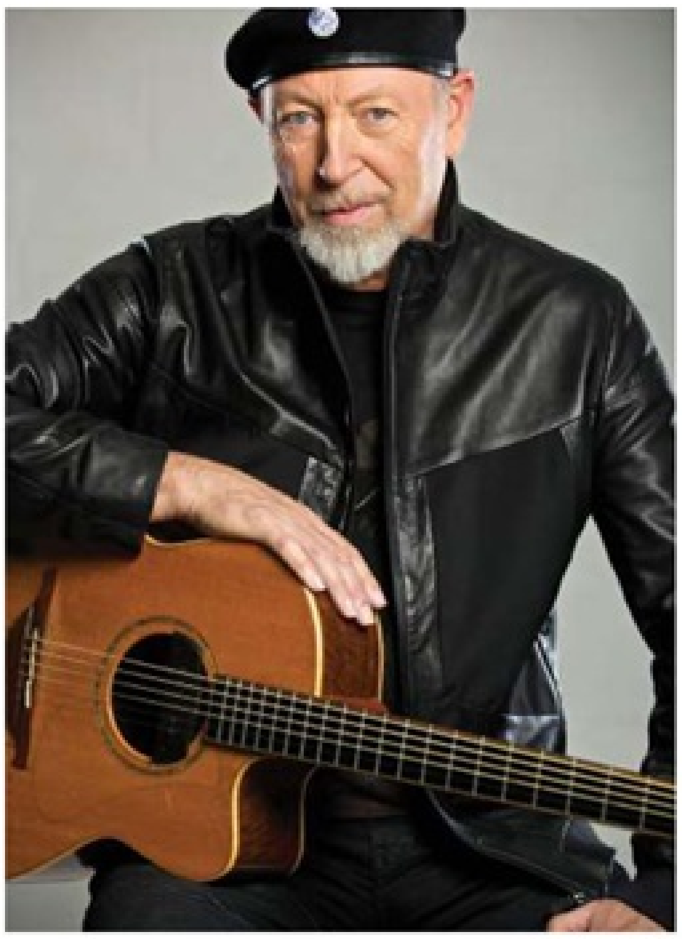
"With acoustic guitars I'm usually playing solo, so I have to cover more bases"

as well. I finally got one when I was about 10 and I got hold of Bert Weedon's *Play in a Day*, the famous guitar instruction manual that everybody started on. I had an older sister, five years older: when she started dating, her boyfriends would come round and I'd get free guitar lessons from them.

How did you come to get your frst guitar?
My dad was a bit of a lapsed guitarist. He got this old Spanish guitar and did it up a bit for the house. He was going to play a bit as was my sister. But I kinda commandeered it and things just went from there.

When you first got into playing the guitar, who were your musical influences?
My dad had lots of records; jazz, Django Reinhardt, things like that, which I was listening to at a young age. When rock 'n' roll came along, my sister had Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly records, which I loved. Then The Shadows came along, as well as some amazing slide guitar players, which were a great inspiration for me.

You're doing a lot of acoustic solo shows over the next few months. What's your live setup?
I use a Lowden signature model, with a Sunrise guitar pickup. Inside the guitar is a condenser mic, I can't remember the brand, I'm sorry; it



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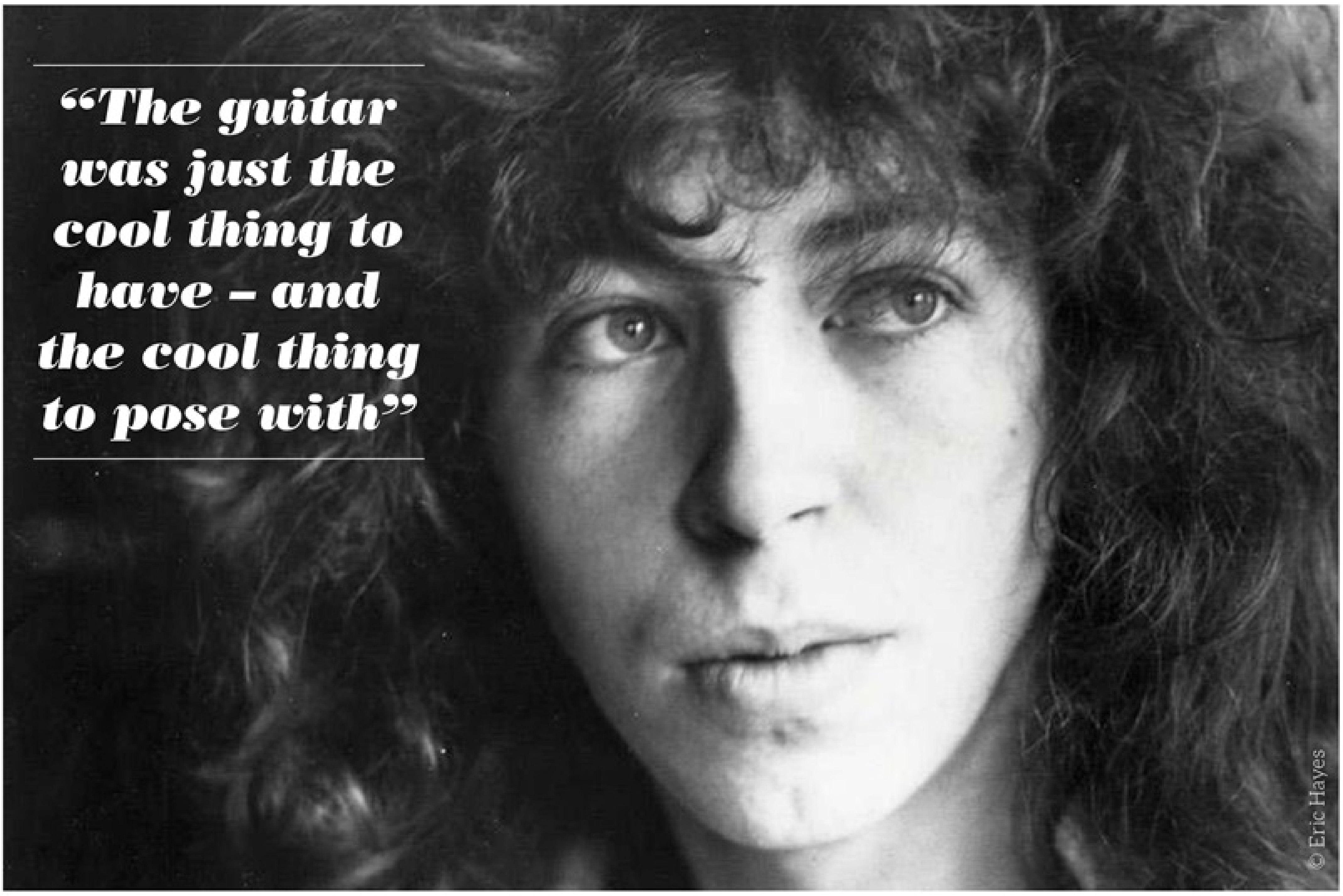
was made by a guy in Nashville who doesn't make them anymore. That goes through a two-channel preamp called a gas cooker, made by a company called Rig Farm Studios. Because that's a tube preamp that warms up the sound a lot.

Any favourites from your personal collection?
I don't have many acoustics, actually. I've got an old beaten-up Martin R-18, which I've had since the 1960s. It's not road-worthy right now as it's got so many cracks in it. Mostly I play Lowdens and have five of his guitars. One I keep for the studio, which sounds great, and a couple of those for stage. I've got a Gibson J-200 which is nice sometimes for recording. I've got a few other handmade guitars too.

Finally, given your distinguished career, what advice would you give to readers?
The most important thing is individuality. There are a lot of good guitar players out there. The more you can sound like yourself – the more you're going to stand out. There are so many copy cats and imitators of existing styles, you have to bring something individual to the table. So, think about the direction of your music and how you can be different. ■

Acoustic Classics II is out now
Info: www.richardthompson-music.com



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13269 - Vintage V400CSB, Cherry Sunburst
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12437 - Yairi FY84 OM Folk Acoustic Guitar
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14426 - Yamaha F310 Dreadnought Tobacco Sunburst
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15548 - Ovation 1771 AX Standard Balladeer, CBB
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
14915 - PJ Eggle Parlour Electro Acoustic
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000N2 Electro Acousti
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
15851 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
16074 - Takamine EG350SC LH Electro Acoustic
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
14951 - Tanglewood TSF CE White
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
15787 - Tanglewood TVC X MP Electro Acoustic
15786 - Tanglewood TW28CE X OV
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR
15581 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk WH
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
12669 - Tanglewood TW45 EG E Super Folk Cutaway
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15496 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, White
15902 - Tanglewood TWCR SFCE Super Folk
15977 - Tanglewood Sundance X15 SDTE
15982 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf Pro X45-AVE
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf Pro X47E
15978 - Tanglewood X70 Electro Acoustic Guitar
13485 - Taylor 515CE Electro Acoustic, Used
14419 - Vintage Pilgrim VPG900 Mayflower Deluxe
15850 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
9189 - Yamaha APX500 III Electro, Sunburst
15575 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Black
15814 - Yamaha FSX720SC II Black
15568 - Yamaha FSX720SC II Brown Sunburst
15815 - Yamaha FSX720SC II Natural
8142 - Yamaha FSX730SC, Brown Sunburst
14420 - Yamaha FX310A Guitar, Natural
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
15617 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel String Silent Black

Mandolin Family

8810 - Ashbury AM-11 Mandolin (Army and Navy)
8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
12568 - Fender Concert Tone "F" 63S Mandolin
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
15532 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin Pack
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon Bouzouki, Nat
15901 - Jimmy Moon Octave Mandolin, Secondhand
4563 - Jimmy Moon Octave Mandolin (Mandola) Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
15599 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin, K&K Pickup
15768 - Ortega RMA40SBK Mandolin, Black
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

Classical Guitars

8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electo Acoustic
15546 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 19 Models in Srock Now
15769 - Ortega Coral NY Nylon String Guitar
15719 - Ortega HoneySuite CE Nylon String Guitar
6913 - Raimundo 630E Electro Classical Guitar
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Aniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
16326 - Stagg C405 Linden 1/4 Classical Guitar
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15858 - Stagg C432 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
13332 - Stagg C510 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
8353 - Stagg C530 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
8350 - Westcoast Classical Guitar
8358 - Westcoast SS Solid Slim Electro Nylon Bk
10994 - Westcoast SS Solid Slim Nylon Electro
8360 - Westcoast Slim Body Electro Classical
8352 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Natural
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
16269 - Yamaha CG170SA, Secondhand
14698 - Yamaha CS40 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
15618 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Black

12 Strings

16141 - Takamine GJ72CE 12 Sunburst, Used
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 Acoustic, Nat
15479 - Tanglewood TW145 12 SS CE

Acoustic Amplification

5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
9494 - AER Compact 60 Mk III
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Signature Compact 60
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
8166 - Fender Acoustasonic 150 Acoustic Combo
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4", Ex-Demo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13966 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
12781 - Marshall AS50R Acoustic Amp, Secondhand
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6605 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
13018 - Tanglewood T330W Acoustic Amplifier
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
16030 - Tanglewood TBA5 5W Acoustic Amp, Used
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
15559 - Baton Rouge UR4C Concert Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
14648 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor Ukulele
16226 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor LEFTY
15554 - Baton Rouge V2 HotRod Conc. Electro Uke
15556 - Baton Rouge V2C Sun Concert Ukulele
15555 - Baton Rouge V2CCE Electro Concert Uke
15553 - Baton Rouge V2T Sun Tenor Ukulele
15790 - Deering Goodtime Tenor Banjo Uke, Used
10386 - Fender Mino'Aka Koa CE Concert Uke
13616 - Fender Pihalea Soprano Ukulele
15833 - Korala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
15691 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
7102 - Ohana CK10 Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
13638 - Ohana CK22 Concert Ukulele
8518 - Ohana CK25S All Solid Concert Ukulele
15958 - Ohana CK28 Concert Ukulele
16104 - Ohana CK35G-5 5-String Concert Ukulele
8519 - Ohana CK35GS Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
7094 - Ohana CK70 Concert Ukulele
16016 - Ohana CK70BA Concert Ukulele
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
15956 - Ohana SK16 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
15960 - Ohana SK21A Ukulele Rosewood Sop
14210 - Ohana SK21M Premium Mahogany Sop
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15957 - Ohana SK28 Soprano Uke
15959 - Ohana SK35GS Solid Mahogany Gloss
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele
4714 - Ohana SK50WG Soprano Ukulele
14508 - Ohana SK70L Soprano Ukulele, Lacewood
4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
16062 - Ohana TK22 Tenor Ukulele
4706 - Ohana TK35G Tenor Ukulele
9049 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Uke
16063 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Ukulele
12184 - Ohana TK50MG Tenor Ukulele
9526 - Ohana TK50WG Tenor Ukulele
16089 - Ohana TK52 Tenor Ukulele
16023 - Ohana TK70KE Tenor Uke, Spruce & Koa
16103 - Ohana TK72 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
16021 - Ohana CK80 Solid Cedar Top Concert Uke
16017 - Ohana Ukuleles SK-30M Large Neck Soprano
16020 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-6 6-string Tenor
16019 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-8 8-string Tenor
12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
16199 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, Black
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
15618 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Black
15621 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Tobacco Brown

Travel & Tenor Guitars

8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
13550 - Eko Mini Evo EQ Travel Guitar In Natural
16287 - JN Cigar Box Cask Hogshead Guitar
16286 - JN Cigar Box Puncheon Cask Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 ÷ Signature Edition
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

© Alessandro Lourenço

STU LARSEN

Stu Larsen has earned an international fan-base since quitting his job and hitting the road ten years ago. With a cracking new album out, Acoustic caught up with the singer-songwriter to chat travels, songwriting and a love for Martin guitars

WORDS: DAN HOBSON

Singer-songwriter Stu Larsen has always done it for the love. The love of performing, writing, travelling, and Martin guitars, has kept Larsen on a never-ending nomadic journey. Typically living out of his suitcase, Larsen is usually somewhere between his native Australia, Spain, Japan, or anywhere else you can name, before setting off for the next destination.

At one point, this sort of wanderlust seemed utterly improbable, however. The shy and quiet child, who grew up on a farm outside the tiny town of Bowenville, Queensland, never thought travelling was his thing. But after his mother dragged him to guitar lessons – in an effort to bring him out of his shell – Larsen got the guitar bug. After heading on the road with Mike Rosenberg [aka Passenger], the traveling bug was also well-and-truly caught.

In 2014, in support of Larsen's appropriately titled debut album *Vagabond*, the shy singer-songwriter brought his music to the masses with numerous global tours, including sold-out shows in North America, Asia, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Along the way, Larsen began collating ideas for what would become his 2017 follow up album, *Resolute*. He recorded impromptu voice memos on his phone, architecting a primitive framework for the songs. As he combed through hundreds of files, Larsen holed up in different locales, whether it be a cottage in Scotland, an apartment in Spain, or an army bunker back in Australia.

Despite the minor set-back of a burst appendix in Indonesia, Larsen finally got round to finishing off the album. Released this summer [reviewed on p82], it really is a fine offering from a humble artist.

How would you describe your sound to people who might not have heard your records before?

I've never been great at describing my sound, but I guess it's some kind of version of acoustic-folk-pop. For the last two records I've had some phenomenal musicians come to add instrumentation to the tracks, to give each song what it needs and deserves. However, for the live shows it's just usually a guitar and myself so when I'm touring, it's completely stripped back.

"I was a very shy kid... my mother thought that learning guitar would help solve this"

The new record has just been released. What can we expect from it?

You can expect a collection of songs about some of the places I've been and some of the people I've met over the last few years. It's been ten years now, since I first quit my job and hit the road, so there are many of moments in time that I've drawn inspiration from for this new album.

Are you happy with how it has turned out?

I'm incredibly happy. It was a long process this time, with trying to get away to isolated places to write, then getting some demos done on my own, bringing Luke Thompson over to the UK to get some more solid versions of the songs down and then finally meeting up with Luke and Chris Vallejo in Sydney to record the album at Linear Studios. I am always happy to keep working on a project until we're one hundred per cent happy with it.

What plans do you have for the autumn?

Touring, touring, touring. The first show is this week in Vancouver with another 70 shows to follow it between now and the end of the year, across North America, Europe and Australia.

How did you first get into playing the guitar?

My mother strongly encouraged me to learn guitar when I was 14. I usually use the word "forced", but she seems to think she wasn't so hard on me. I remember it differently. I was a very shy kid, I wouldn't answer the phone if it rang and I would go and hide in my room if someone came to visit the house, I didn't really want to interact with people very much. My mother thought that learning guitar would help solve this problem. I resisted at first and even well into the first weeks of lessons, but eventually I started to

get the hang of it thanks to a very kind and patient teacher named Bob Cook. I owe a lot to Bob and my mother for having faith in me and pushing me to do something.

Who were your early musical influences?
My parents listened to The Seekers and Johnny Horton, but the first artist I got obsessed with was Elvis Presley. As a ten year old, he just captivated me. I then moved on to legendary artists like John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, Etta James, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, Aretha Franklin and Elmore James because the local record store was selling their CDs for two dollars out the front of the shop. I was really into blues and jazz for a good few years before I started to find my own acoustic style in my early twenties.

Who is inspiring you these days?
I am always going back to Neil Young, the earlier work of Damien Rice and Ray LaMontagne, with a bit of Crosby, Stills, and Nash, and also Bob Dylan thrown in there too. There are also a few amazing current artists I'm listening to like Gregory Alan Isakov, Leif Vollebek and The Teskey Brothers. I'm always waiting for the next records from Luke Thompson, Tim Hart and Jed Appleton too.

Tell me about your live set-up. What instruments and equipment are you using?
Just a single guitar and me. I'm currently playing a 2007 Martin OM-28V, which I found at the Acoustic Centre in South Melbourne, she's been very faithful to me. I also carry a couple of AKG microphones (D7 and D5) with me, I've found they suit my vocal nicely and I try taking my LR Baggs Para Acoustic DI too. The only other addition to my live set up is a handful of Hohner Special 20 Harmonicas. I like to travel light.

Can you tell me a bit more about your songwriting process?
I don't think I've actually worked out a process myself yet. I know that I need to be isolated for a week or so to get into a zone where songs can flow. Normally, I literally just sit with a guitar and start playing whatever chords my fingers land on and then start singing whatever thoughts are in my head and sometimes a song appears. I don't like to complicate it; I enjoy the mystery of songwriting. I don't think I really know how to create a song, but I am learning to have all the ingredients ready before I try to create a song.

If you had some advice for guitarists and performers reading this, what would it be?
Be genuine – I think people can tell when you're real and equally, people can tell when you're trying to fake it. Love what you do – is there any point doing something you don't love? I think you need to feel it and love it. Persevere – things generally don't happen overnight. Be patient and keep chasing the things you desire. ■

Stu Larsen's new album *Resolute* is out now. Info: www.stularsen.com

© Carsten Windhorst

"Love what you do – is there any point doing something you don't love?"

GEARBOX

Larsen has a very unique naming system for the guitars in his collection, as he explains, naming them after the cities where he discovered them.

With such a level of dedication, we thought it churlish not to ask for the story behind each of them...

HAMBURG *2014 MARTIN CEO-7*

When my father passed away in February 2014, he left a little bit of money to my mother, sister, brother and me. I wanted to use it in a way that he'd have liked, to be a reminder of him forever. I was on tour in Europe exactly a year later and found this guitar at Just Music in Hamburg, which was underneath the venue we'd played in.

MELBOURNE *2007 MARTIN OM-28V*

This guitar is actually owned by my fans. I'd been borrowing guitars for a few years when a fan donated $100 and encouraged others to do the same. Before I knew it there was enough money to buy a decent guitar! I was in Melbourne for a show in 2009 and visited The Acoustic Centre where I saw this on the wall. It was literally love at first sight.

CHICAGO *1973 MARTIN D-35*

I was on my first headline tour of North America back in 2014, travelling from Montréal to San Diego with Nashville's Adam Burrows, covering 9,000 miles along the way. About halfway through we spent an afternoon at Chicago Music Exchange. I just kept gravitating towards this old 1973 Martin D-35. Beautiful. I started playing some simple chords and singing whatever words might flow from my lips. I had started writing 'Chicago Song' before I even knew it.

SAINT PAUL *1927 MARTIN 0-18*

It was 2013 when this beautiful guitar came into my life! Mike Passenger and I were doing a two-month tour of North America and visited Willie's American Guitars in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I just couldn't put this one down; playing it quietly in the corner of the store, but knew I couldn't afford it. Then, to my complete surprise, Mike ended up buying it for me as thanks for helping him out over the years. I was overwhelmed and will be forever thankful.

JOAN OSBORNE

Joan Osborne always brings out the best in other people's songs. For her new record, she's tackling the works of a living legend – Bob Dylan. Acoustic caught up with Joan ahead of the UK release

WORDS: DAN HOBSON

Joan Osborne has always had a gift of interpreting other people's songs and bringing out the best in them. In 1995, she turned Eric Bazilian's 'One of Us' into a worldwide hit, sparking a multi-platinum career for the singer-songwriter. Osborne has now turned her attention to the works of Bob Dylan with new album *Songs Of Bob Dylan*. Osborne's own take on a number of Dylan's most loved tracks, the album spans early classics such as 'Masters of War' and 'Highway 61 Revisited' through to his later material, such as 1997's 'High Water'.

The release follows a series of concerts Osborne performed in the USA – *Joan Osborne Sings the Songs of Bob Dylan* – earlier this year. But this isn't the first time Osborne has had a musical connection to the great man himself. In 2003, she joined the surviving members of The Grateful Dead to sing 'Tears of Rage' with Dylan onstage. In 1998, she recorded 'Chimes of Freedom' with Dylan for NBC miniseries *The '60s* too.

Kentucky native Osborne, who moved to New York in the 80s, got her start performing her own songs in the city's downtown rock clubs, just as she began to rediscover Dylan's work with Oh Mercy. "When you're playing in the nightclub scene in Greenwich Village, his trail is everywhere," said Osborne. "Not just because he played in the same places, but because people still perform his music every night."

Inspired by the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, who put together an eight-album series of her takes on Cole Porter, Harold Arlen and other Songbook writers' classics, *Songs Of Bob Dylan* is released in the UK this month, so *Acoustic* thought it the perfect opportunity for a chat.

Where are you now and what are you up to?

I'm sitting in my car in a beautiful little town in upstate New York called Roscoe.

So the new album, *Songs of Bob Dylan*, is coming out this month. What can we expect from the record?

Well, it's songs from all through Dylan's career. I wanted to do that because I'm a big fan of his later works, a lot of stuff which many are not familiar with. *Love and Theft* from 2001, for instance, is a really great record – but I know Dylan fans who don't even know it.

For some years you've toyed with the idea of recording a series of Songbook albums, akin to Ella Fitzgerald's eight-album series. How come you chose Bob Dylan for the first?

I had a bit of a connection with Dylan anyway, having recorded his songs before. I also had the honour and privilege of singing with him before. I also thought that he had so many brilliant and classic songs that there would be a lot of choice. You could do a whole series of albums of Dylan songs alone.

Sounds like you have more covers albums planned? Who would you tackle next?

I'm hoping that this is a series as it's a really interesting creative challenge. I feel like it's something that people have responded to really well in the live shows too. Other artists I'd consider are Tom Waits, Lucinda Williams, possibly Neil Young.

Has Bob Dylan always been an artist who meant a lot to you?

I had a period of time when I was a little resistant to being a Dylan fan. Some of his songs have an edge of cruelty, misogyny even. But you just can't deny the accomplishments of his songwriting – he's like a Pablo Picasso

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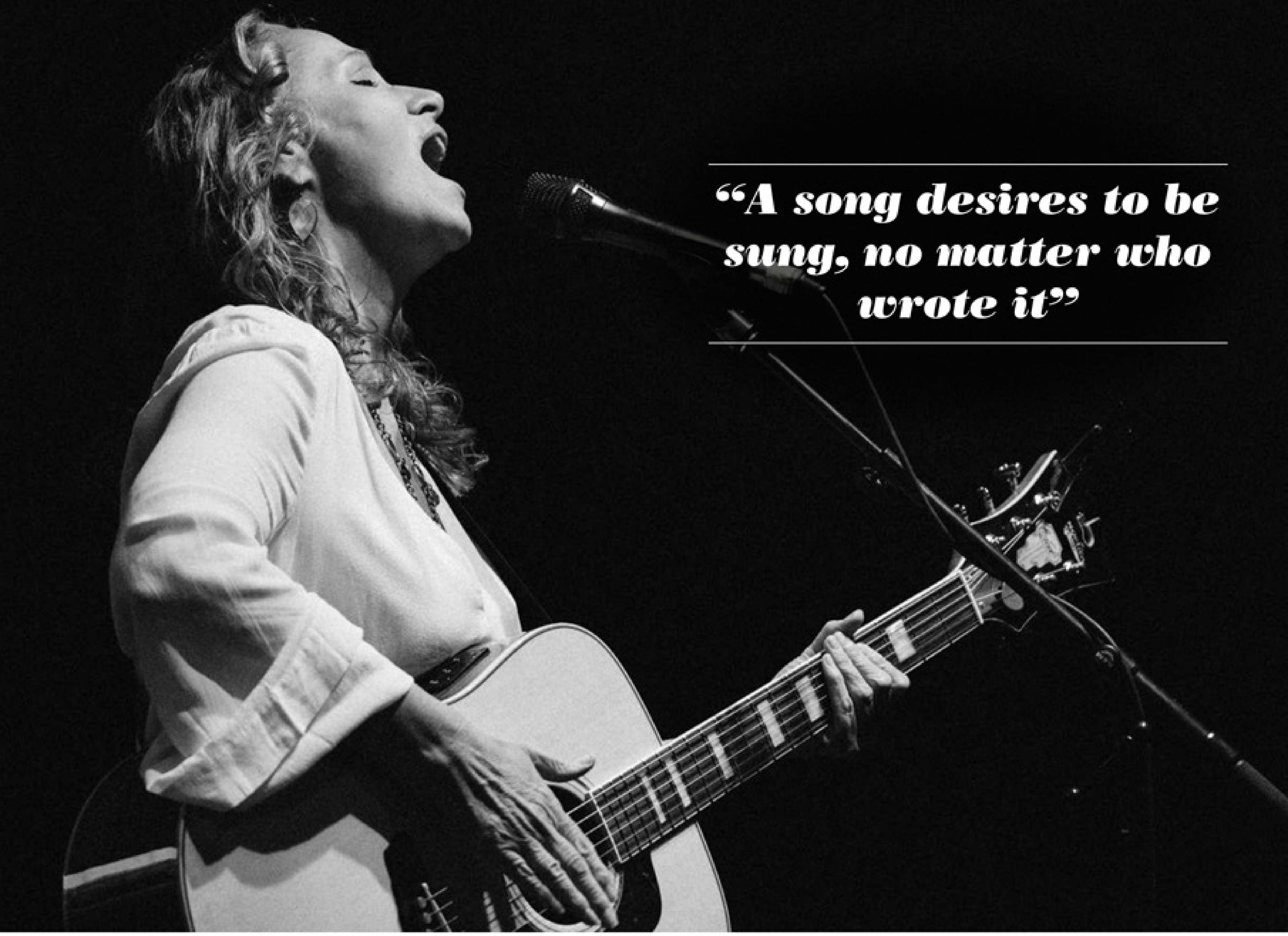


> **“A song desires to be sung, no matter who wrote it”**

figure. I understand that I don't have to like every one of his songs to be a fan.

Out of interest, what is your favourite Bob Dylan song of all time?
That's an impossible question. I can give you my top five today: 'Visions of Joanna', 'To Make Me Feel Your Love', 'Blind Willie McTell', and 'Positively 4th Street'..

None of which are on the album, interestingly... What was your selection criteria for inclusion?
I tried to find songs that suited my voice. Perhaps I will cover them another time. The songs on the album are ones that I thought I could find a way of doing.

You experiment with the arrangements on the songs. Were you nervous about 'messing with' the songs of such a legend?
I think you have to be somewhat bold because if you just try to do a version of a Dylan song exactly like he did, or that loads of other people have done, then it's pointless. You have to be radical.

Where was the album recorded and how long did it take to finish?
We did most of the basic tracks with Jack Petruzzelli in the mountains of Pennsylvania. I liked the notion of getting everyone away from their day-to-day lives. We didn't take a long time recording, really, around five or six days. Then we did overdubs and so on in New York. We worked on it for a couple of weeks afterwards.

You're pretty much on tour for the rest of the year. Do you enjoy being on the road?
I really enjoy doing concerts, making music and hanging out with musicians; it's a nice bubble to live in. The travelling can really wear on you, though. I try to build in a little bit of time off so we can see a bit of the places we go to. Recently we did some hiking in Oregon and saw the beaches in California. I have a 12-year-old daughter and spending time away from her is really hard.

What do you think Bob Dylan would think of the album?
Well, I would hope that he wouldn't get pissed at me [laughs]. I don't think so. I mean, why write a song? He just released his third album of standards, so he must understand that a song desires to be sung, no matter who wrote it. It continues to live only if people sing it.

What guitars do you use live?
I have a beautiful D'Angelico guitar that I take with me on the road. I also use it for writing when I'm on the road too. It's got a built-in tuner and Fishman preamp.

Will you return to the UK for a tour soon?
I'm really excited about the recording being released in the UK and I can't wait to come back and play some more shows there. I was there in April and really enjoyed it. It won't be long before I'm back there again. ■

Songs of Bob Dylan **is out now.**
Info: www.joanosborne.com

CAMBRIDGE FOLK FESTIVAL

After a cracking weekend at Cambridge Folk Festival, Andy Hughes is left impressed by the progressive nature of the event

PHOTOS: JORDAN HARRIS

It is still possible, in 2017, to find intelligent people who think that folk music means large men in cable knit sweaters with bushy beards drinking from engraved tankards with a finger in the ear singing about fair maidens milking cows in cotton dresses. Fortunately, the annual Cambridge Folk Festival continues comprehensively to shatter such out-dated cliché images – confirming that folk music is as vibrant, inventive, exciting, and varied, as any musical genre you can find.

Due, as always, to the inability to cover every single performance, and the requirement to focus on the acoustic guitar performers, the standard apologies to those artists not mentioned purely for reasons of available space.

Friday was dubbed by the media as 'Women's Takeover Day' which takes far too seriously the decision to put out an all-female line-up – hardly revolutionary for an event that has always prided itself on an even distribution of genders when selecting its performers across all its areas and venues.

A major highlight of the day was the performance by **Amythyst Kiah** who evokes both Dolly Parton and Tracy Chapman with her spellbinding voice and uncluttered lyrical finger-picking guitar work.

Also up there in the memory-creation area was Liverpool band **She Drew The Gun**, described as 'psych-pop' (me neither) by the media, who created a fabulous mash-up of Jefferson Airplane's 'White Rabbit' with Sugarbabes' 'Overload'; a wonderful fan-developing performance.

Friday was also a day of contrasts – the lyrically heartfelt singing and playing of **Lisa Hannigan** was far more enjoyable than the by-the-numbers 'country' music of **Ward Thomas** which was a little too slick for a weekend audience that likes the emotion at the front of its entertainment.

Saturday, and **Fantastic Negrito** completely lived up to that adjective, setting the bar seriously high for those to follow later in the day. This is where modern acoustic music is headed, and as usual, CFF is picking him up early, before America takes him away from us.

Cambridge Folk Festival planners are experts at picking just the right band to round off each night, and **Indigo Girls** slotted in perfectly. Their lengthy career sees them losing none of the social and political bite

Bugg transcends his young age with the breadth and maturity of his playing

of their material, and on the night their peerless harmonies were embellished by **Lucy Wainwright-Roche** who has been touring with them. It was a warm and wonderful end to a varied and diverse day of music.

One of the great advantages of the Cherry Hinton site is the clever way they use a relatively small area and give it the feeling of space and variety by making each stage unique: not an easy task considering their proximity, which means you can leave one stage audience and join the other in less than one minute. Over on Stage Two, **Roxanne De Bastion** gave a winning performance of acoustic songs sung in a voice that greatly appeals, and backed by a winning personality – music to check out more closely if she performs near you.

Stage One provided a veritable feast of spirited and passionate performances to

Lightning bolt: Jake Bugg graced the Sunday headline slot

Shaping up: Frank Turner stepped in to replace Olivia Newton John

That Friday feeling: Lisa Hannigan got the festival off to a great start

round off Saturday night – **Jon Boden And The Remnant Kings** brought a brand-new set of songs for their performance, reflecting Boden's unofficial 'King of Cambridge' status – underlined by his selection as the inaugural Guest Curator for this year's event – that he carried off such a bold move. Acoustic music doesn't do hierarchies, but if it did, Boden would be at the top end without a doubt.

Six studio albums in, there'll be plenty at Cambridge unaware that **Frank Turner** started out singing with a hardcore rock band. But he brought all that stagecraft and experience to the Cambridge stage; his show setting the seal on a wonderful day and night of music. Stepping in to replace Olivia Newton-John at short notice, Turner gave the adoring audience a rocking 'You're The One That I Want' which somehow fitted in perfectly with the vibe and atmosphere he and his band created. A class act.

Sunday's strongest selection was once again delivered from Stage One with veteran acoustic player and performance genius **Loudon Wainwright III** playing from a stool (recovering from recent surgery) and providing his standard mix of witty lyrics, cleverly understated guitar playing, and an endless variety of facial expressions for the big screen to pick up. Not for nothing is Loudon one of this event's most frequent, and appreciated performers. Although Stage One had the lion's share of the audience for the evening, a special mention for another Cambridge legend, **Martin Simpson**, whose performance saw the Stage Two audience space packed to capacity, with plenty more people gathering at the open side of the marquee to catch a glimpse of his wonderful performance.

There is a time at any festival, where one moment of one performance by one artist or band encapsulates the special atmosphere unique to the event, and that was during **The Oysterband**'s very special show, when everyone, band and audience together experienced the sheer joy that is acoustic music played with passion and pleasure. This was a particularly hard act to follow, and that task was placed on the slim shoulders of festival headline performer, **Jake Bugg**.

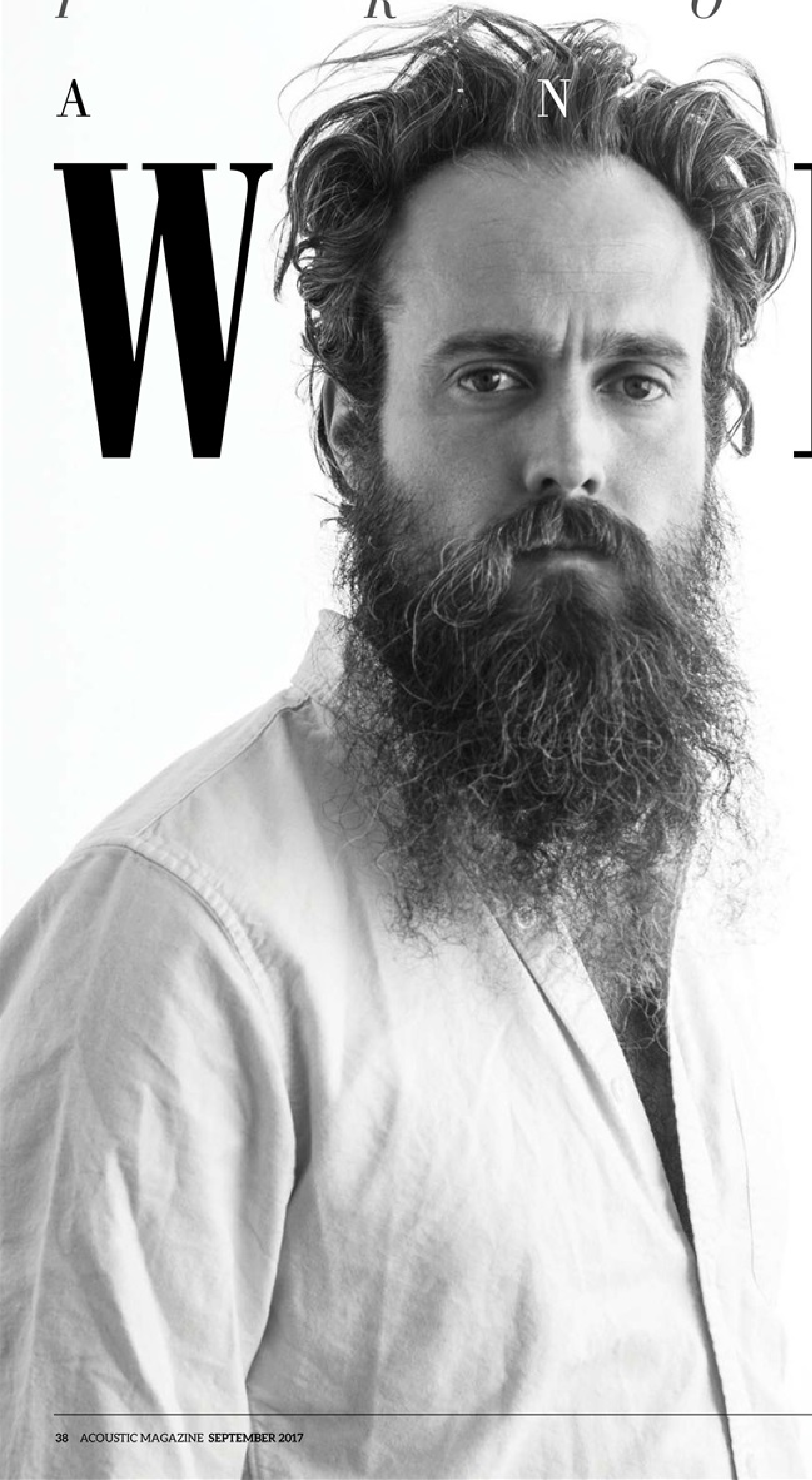
It's hard to believe that CFF's proven antennae for spotting talent brought a teenage Jake Bugg to play the smallest stage, The Den, back in 2012. Now, five years later, he returned to headline the festival. During that time, Bugg's impressive talents as songwriter and performer have seen him rise to the heights of popularity, and watching his show here, it's very easy to see why.

As a singer and as a guitarist, Bugg transcends his appearance, and indeed his young age, with the breadth and maturity of his playing and singing. Armed only with a parlour-sized acoustic guitar and the occasional musical and moral support of his keyboard player, Bugg transfixed the audience from the start with the atmospheric voice he uses to deliver his poignant and emotional songs. For acoustic guitar fans, Bugg demonstrates his mastery of his instrument, mixing delicate fingerstyle work with ringing hard-hit chords, which he uses to build his unique soundscapes. It's only when he speaks to the audience that you remember just how young he is; his shy, minimal stage chat, completely at odds with the lyrical visions he paints with his powerful vocal delivery. If he had any nerves about carrying the headline slot at this most prestigious of acoustic musical showcases, Bugg hid them well, and clearly enjoyed the rapt attention and ringing applause that greeted his performance tonight.

Folk music is varied and diverse in the instrumentation it uses to deliver – but it is fitting that the headline at the year's – at times rain-sodden – festival is an acoustic musician. Proof if any were needed of the power and versatility of the acoustic guitar.

Until next year! ■

IRON AND WINE



N E

On the eve of his accomplished Beast Epic release, Acoustic hangs with one of music's coolest and hirsute players to chat new album, open tunings and that ace low end country blues sound

WORDS: GLENN KIMPTON

When we catch up with Sam Beam, who performs as Iron and Wine, he is ready for the evening's solo show in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The performance will inevitably be full of charm and strong tunes, as one would expect.

"Yeah I'm playing out solo tonight, which is cool," he begins, cheerfully. "But for me, music is meant to be played with other people." Considering his recent output – which includes strong collaborations with Jesca Hoop on last year's *Love Letter for Fire* and Ben Bridwell on 2015's *Sing into my Mouth* – perhaps this shouldn't be a surprise. "Playing with other people is a lot more fun," he adds. "What I like about the solo shows, though, is that you don't have anybody following you, so you can change songs on a dime and follow the muse. But the conversation between musicians is still more interesting and that's what I'm really all about."

That conversation is never clearer than on the new *Beast Epic* album, a set of 11 concise tunes that is fully deserving of the word 'beauty' in its truest sense. It's a beguiling and unique record that immediately seizes the listener in a quiet grip and hangs on for 36 minutes. "I feel like beauty is what I strive for in music," he says. "But beauty comes in a lot of guises and sometimes it ain't pretty. Sometimes it's where you've exposed something and come across a kind of resonant truth, and I love that. This album was a little different to make, because I wasn't pushing quite so hard for something I didn't recognise; I was just looking for something that struck me as true.

"I've been enjoying playing with a lot of jazz musicians lately, but approaching it from a bit of a folk angle. People have been doing that for years, so my template was those John Martyn records, or the Van Morrison ones to begin with. Even the Roberta Flack or Nina Simone

records where they're playing folk music, just with jazz musicians. They come with the same chord changes, just a different vocabulary and different transitions, and I really like that kind of music. That was in my mind at the time, but I didn't have a specific idea of what it was going to sound like, and I think the results are all the better for that."

One thing noticeable on the record is the space the arrangements afford; there is an unhurried, confident nature to it. "Yeah, that was intentional," he nods. "I wanted the space on there to allow for that moment when a musician feels inspired to step forward, so there's room for him to do that. But there's also space for the lyrics to move on top as well. It's a bit of a trick; people get used to improvising together, they know where the song is going and where there is room to make a bold move or just sit back and be supportive. It's a fun atmosphere to create in a studio where it feels like a group of people working as one continuous in sync creature."

It's also a sure-footed musician who will strip back the sound and produce an album that throws another curve ball at the listener. "I do feel like there are a lot of similarities to the early stuff," he considers. "Mainly because of the simplicity that there is to it, but at the same time it sounds significantly different to those records and it took the journey in between to get to that place..." He stops short and laughs. "I don't know if that makes sense, but that's how I'd describe it!"

Another way to describe the set is 'acoustic'. Although there are some interesting dynamic and sonic shifts – not least the zany percussion intro to 'About a Bruise' – the acoustic guitar underpins each of the songs to create a steady hand on the tiller throughout.

"Yeah, this is the first record in a while where it's been almost all acoustic," he agrees. "I think there's one song on there where I'm on electric guitar, but not really using it for what it's capable of, just for variation. But I felt that that signature acoustic sound really glued all of the songs together; there is some variety in the types of songs, so it really fitted. I've been enjoying playing the acoustic at the home more often, so I tried to let that inform the recordings too. This whole album is pretty much acoustic, even the samples we used are like bowed glass or something! There were no electric sounds this time, but there are some really strange resonances on there. I wanted to stick to a smaller palette of sounds to draw from on this album; you still have all of these options, but it makes it more cohesive, especially when you're trying to tackle different genres of music."

Although a considered and subtle player, as *Beast Epic* testifies, it is clear that Beam knows his way around a fretboard, so we delved a little deeper into his musical background. "I only had so many instruments laying around, so I picked up an acoustic guitar because that was what was in the house," he answers, simply. "My dad had one, but to be fair, most of the bands I listened to, be it punk rock or whatever, were all pretty much guitar led and had that driving percussive string sound. Going back, I maybe would've liked to have started on the piano, but guitar sure is fun. On this record in particular I used a bunch of different open tunings, I was having a ball just letting those bizarre chords that you come up with ring out and create these strange resonances. It was mostly open B, so really tuned down, but I'm notorious for using

the capo, and if one string wasn't working with what we were doing at the time, I'd just change it, so I don't know half of them! Mainly it was like a DADGAD tuning, but with it all down to B; that's how you get that twang and buzz and those deep resonances." A little pause. "I like that stuff, man. It becomes less chimey and more textural and it also gives it a weight that I think they call 'country blues'. You can call it whatever you want to, I just call it cool. I like the low end, I'm a sucker for the rhythm section and getting as low as possible into that groove."

When it came to recording the new album, the band went up into Wilco's Loft studio, and we all know how much Jeff Tweedy enjoys a decent acoustic. "Jeff has this incredible collection of guitars, so I was pretty much testing all of the time," Beam says casually. "I ended up with a lot of parlour sized guitars and some lovely Collings ones too. To be honest, I couldn't really tell you which ones I used, because I was always picking up something new. I sometimes used two or three for a song and hadn't even realised I'd switched."

It sounds like a ton of fun, but for Beam, it's more of a sonic experiment. "I'm not really a gear person," he admits. "So I don't really have an allegiance to them; I just pick them up and try to make the best sound with what I've got. If it's not working – I'll reach for another. Every song is different, so I don't really have a pre-set group of sounds I want. I think my voice is the only pre-set, everything else just kind of floats around it." Unfortunately for Beam, he can't load Jeff Tweedy's attic onto a tour bus, so he makes sure he has some reliable instruments to take on the road with him and confirms that it's less about the aesthetic of the instrument and more about the variety of sound it produces. "For the live shows I use these Taylor guitars," he states. "I just love the pickup system that they have, it sounds really transparent and natural. I like them a lot better than the Piezo systems; it's like a series of contact mics underneath the top and it sounds really cool."

"I love short records.I like the idea of giving the listener something that doesn't answer everything"

At 36 minutes, *Beast Epic* is a cohesive, compact set of songs – a choice that is becoming less usual these days for a major release (consider Father John Misty's *Pure Comedy*, which hits 74 minutes). But the 'epic' in the title doesn't feel like irony. "Man I love short records," Sam responds, with a cackle. "Even in a conversation, I want to be there slightly less time than I need to be. And I like the idea of giving [the listener] something that doesn't answer everything, you know? I want an album to leave something for you to imagine that might not even be there." He carries on chuckling for a bit at himself before concluding: "I think what it really comes down to is that I have a very short attention span. Short songs on a short record."

***Beast Epic* is out now on Sub Pop.**
Info: www.ironandwine.com

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CAR

On the cusp of releasing her new album, Carla Bruni tells Acoustic why modelling and becoming France's first lady have always been mere sideshows to her music

WORDS: JULIAN PIPER

BRU

© Eric J Guillemain

"No, not an inch!" chuckles Carla Bruni, when asked if she misses being France's first lady. "I just want to hang out and be a musician and be cool." For Carla Bruni, fate has long worked in mysterious ways. Considering the career she's enjoyed, hanging on Nicolas Sarkozy's arm must seem a minor inconvenience.

In 2009, Michelle Obama gave Bruni a replica vintage Gibson J-45

Imagine: you've dreamt of being a singer from childhood, but instead you unexpectedly become a catwalk sensation at the age of 19. You become a multi-millionairess a few years later; your face featured on 250 magazine covers. You never need to work again. Stifled by what you see as the lack of creativity in the modelling business, you ditch your career. Finally, able to concentrate on childhood singing ambitions, you make your recording debut in 2002 with album *Quelqu'un M'a Dit* (Someone told me).

Despite starting off as a slow burner, the record eventually becomes a huge success – selling in excess of two million copies to date. But after three more albums, at which point your music career's gathering momentum, the man in your life becomes the president of France. Once again, your music has to go on hold.

Now, of course, the cynic might suggest that none of this is exactly gruelling. Most of us would give our eye teeth to have enjoyed those kind of chances. But it's easy to understand why, after her first lady role, Bruni is clearly delighted to have her new album, *French Touch*, about to hit the streets.

To think French female singers is inevitably to conjure visions of the elfin Francoise Hardy, or possibly Sylvie Vartan; Euro pop riddled with languorous ballads, cheesy choruses and maybe an accordion grinding in the mix.

Much to her credit, each of Bruni's albums has been dramatically different; she's continually eschewed any suggestion of following in the Hardy/Vartan tradition. For *French Touch*, she's chosen to cover a quirky bunch of songs. Unlikely bedfellows include Depeche Mode's 'Enjoy The Silence', 'Miss You' by the Rolling Stones and a strangely understated take of AC/DC's 'Highway To Hell', all delivered in Bruni's captivating sultry voice.

I speak to Bruni at her Paris home in the 16th Arrondissement. Europe is in the throes of a heat wave and she apologises for being late, but her home is without air conditioning and she needed to cool off. Her living room is crammed with recording equipment, a piano taking pride of place.

© Eric J Guillemain

I was apprehensive: given the weighty trials and tribulations of the Sarkozy presidential era, Bruni could be forgiven for being wary of journalists. But she's surprisingly unguarded in her conversation, self deprecating, and as I quickly discover, laughs a lot. "No I'm OK [with journalists]. I'm Italian, so I like to talk very much – promotion is not really a problem for me," she reassures.

Born in 1967, Bruni is the scion of a wealthy Italian industrialist family, the Bruni Tedeschi's, who moved to France when she was seven years old to avoid the attentions of the Italian Red Brigades. From an early age, music played a pivotal role in Bruni's life. Her mother Marisa Borini was a classical pianist. Her father Alberto Bruni Tedeschi was an industrialist and classical composer. In 2008, Bruni told Vanity Fair that her biological father is actually Italian-born Brazilian grocery magnate Maurizio Remmert, whom her mother had a six-year affair with after meeting at a concert in Turin, when Remmert was a 19-year-old classical guitarist.

Being a house guest at the Bruni home must certainly have been interesting; family singalongs sometimes included Maria Callas and Herbert Von Karajan. "Yes, I always heard music, it was just part of the family somehow, like another family member. They played music all the time," she says. "It's the same thing as when you live with people that smoke, then you also become a smoker.

"They tried to teach me piano and violin, both instruments I really love, but I didn't want to learn how to read classical music. But from the beginning, music was always in my blood. My mother always said that she could be attracted to a man who wasn't physically strong or good looking, but she could never love a man who

> ***“My family played music... It’s like when you live with smokers: you also become a smoker”***

© David Bellemere

didn't love music – and I agree."

When Bruni was 11-years-old, frustrated by her lack of interest in the classical muse, her parents bought her a guitar. "This was great, because I could finally play whatever I wanted, without having to read any notes. That's when I really started to play music every day, just like my family."

Carla's early influences were an unlikely mix of Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Joni Mitchell. "I always loved women's voices," she says. "Of course I couldn't see myself as ever projecting myself like Ella Fitzgerald, but even at that age I listened to all these people."

Her brother also had an important influence. "I would rush into my his room and steal records," she admits. "I was living in France then, so I would listen a lot to French acts, but also bands like The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, and The Clash – from my brother's record collection.

"When I started buying my own records, the first thing I bought was David Bowie's *Changes*. I started putting all my pocket money into buying records. I'd have a listen and try to play the songs, copy the songs from all these people that I loved.

"I listened to Bob Dylan a lot, and Leonard Cohen; I guess my taste was made at that time, and all thanks to my brother's collection, it gave me a strong direction. My models were always people who you could imagine just coming to your house and sitting down to play; musicians whose music was very simple."

Carla gave up modelling in 1997, but another five years would pass before the release of *Quelqu'un M'a Dit*. Why so long? "It took me 30 years to find the courage to sing," she admits. "And I could only do it because I wrote my own songs; I knew that I wasn't Aretha Franklin or Barbra Streisand.

"I loved my time modelling, and the fashion world is very creative, but not when you're a model. For designers, for photographers, even if you're a makeup artist or a stylist it can be quite creative. But when you're a model, you're just the cherry on the cake. Even though it's important – you're wearing the outfit and posing for the picture and going on the runway – the whole creative side of things is done by the designers and photographers; they are the ones in charge. I was very interested in the fashion world, but it's all about walking and posing. It's a funny job and I loved it, but even though it gave me a lot of work, it's not as creative as writing songs of course."

> **"It took me 30 years to get courage to sing. And then only because I wrote the songs..."**

By the 1990s, Bruni was among the 20 highest-paid fashion models, earning US$7.5 million in her peak year. While modeling, Bruni dated Eric Clapton and Mick Jagger.

In Motherless Child: The Definitive Biography of Eric Clapton, Paul Scott writes that Clapton introduced Bruni to Jagger at a Rolling Stones gig at New York's Shea Stadium in 1990. Fearing Jagger would make a play for Bruni, Clapton pleaded: "Please, Mick, not this one. I think I'm in love." His plea fell of deaf ears, however.

Vanity projects have long been the curse of our celebrity lifestyle. But when *Quelqu'un M'a Dit* was released in 2002, the record quietly went on to be a huge success. "The album's still selling now worldwide," Bruni is quick to point out. "It's sold everywhere: in South America, North America. It's sold a lot in Spain and Germany too. It was a miracle being that all the singing was in French, and the idea was so French! I wrote all the songs except 'La Noyee', a song by Serge Gainsbourg that I first heard on an old movie soundtrack, *The Horsethief*. The song was never really released, and I found it in this tribute book of his music, which also happened to have a CD. I loved it."

Do she feel that language has always been

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> **"I still get stage fright, but I feel better now – it must be age"**

a handicap for French musicians? "Yes, and with Italy it's the same thing. We have many fantastic composers, but they're not so famous abroad, because they are so Italian. It's difficult for people, and it's not easy to catch the song if you don't get the lyrics. It's not 'on the air' music, the kind of stuff you hear on the radio, it's more music that you have to sit down and listen to."

Until the release of *Quelqu'un M'a Dit*, Bruni's performances had been limited to a few small French gigs. But in 2002, Carla celebrated the album's release by undertaking a 40-date tour. "I performed in Paris for a few months as well, which was fun. But that was it, I didn't tour for the next album, or for the third album because I was married to Nicholas [Sarkozy]; it was too complicated to think about touring while my man was still President. But as soon as he stopped [being President], in 2013 and 2014, I played a world tour – the U.S., Israel, Germany – the biggest tour I'd done."

And it can't have been easy. Bruni readily admits to suffering from stage fright. "I still get it, but I feel better now – it must be age," she exclaims. "Age leaves you less time, no time for fear! Actually, I kind of quite like it now; after a few seconds of the first song, the music just takes over. But I have a tendency to drink to overcome the fear – and that's not a good thing. Now I take just one beer before I go on stage, to try and melt down the fear a little bit. The problem is that when you drink, you imagine that you are much better than you are. So now I drink as soon as I stop – I'm very reasonable," she laughs.

For most musicians, the musical life starts with small gigs or a spot of busking; but, because of her fame as a model, Bruni never had that opportunity. "Yes it's true," she admits. "And I know I've missed that whole thing of being a musician on tour and 'hanging out'. But I started performing very late in my life. Then also I'm not a man, so I'm always looking forward to going home; touring is not something that comes naturally to me, I miss home and the whole idea of being away is just contradictory."

For *French Touch*, Bruni enlisted the services of producer David Foster; the pair met after a Los Angeles gig in 2013. It was Foster who suggested that she make an album of cover songs – and that she should sing in English.

"I never thought I'd do an album like this, because it's a singer's record really, not a songwriter album," she says. "It's the first time that I'm only singing songs and not writing them. It feels very different, but it was such good fun. It's a mix of both our ideas and the result of searching for material together. Some of the songs, like the Clash's 'Jimmy Jazz', I've played since I was a teenager. Others we kind of twisted the original version," she laughs. "We recorded 20 songs and ended up keeping 11; the final choice was sort of spontaneous and clueless. The main link between all the songs, is that they go back a long way and are mostly songs I played for pleasure – just with my guitar at home when I was young. Some of the songs are very personal, but whatever a song is, I believe that when you interpret it on your own, it becomes something personal anyway. My guitar playing is very soft in a very acoustic way and so we kept that and tried to create the songs as if they were my own. In a way the album's a dream come true; I imagined I became a singer only because I was writing my songs, and that was my excuse for becoming a singer."

Acoustic was surprised to find 'Highway To Hell' covered. "Yes, my son, who is 16, is a metal fan and he's not very happy," she laughs. "When I played the song, he looked at me and said 'it sounds like jazz for older people'! I love the lyrics. There's a good Italian proverb that says 'good girls go to heaven – but bad girls go everywhere'. That's what this song reminds me of; I want to go to heaven, though, if heaven's real." ■

***French Touch* is released on October 6**
Info: www.carlabruni.com

Eric Clapton was Bruni's former flame, until she met Mick Jagger

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OVATION GUITARS GLEN CAMPBELL SIGNATURE

The sad news of Glen Campbell's passing was announced the day that this issue went to press; however, just this summer a reissue of the much-loved singer-guitarist's Ovation signature was unveiled. Ollie McGhie gave his thoughts on this classic model

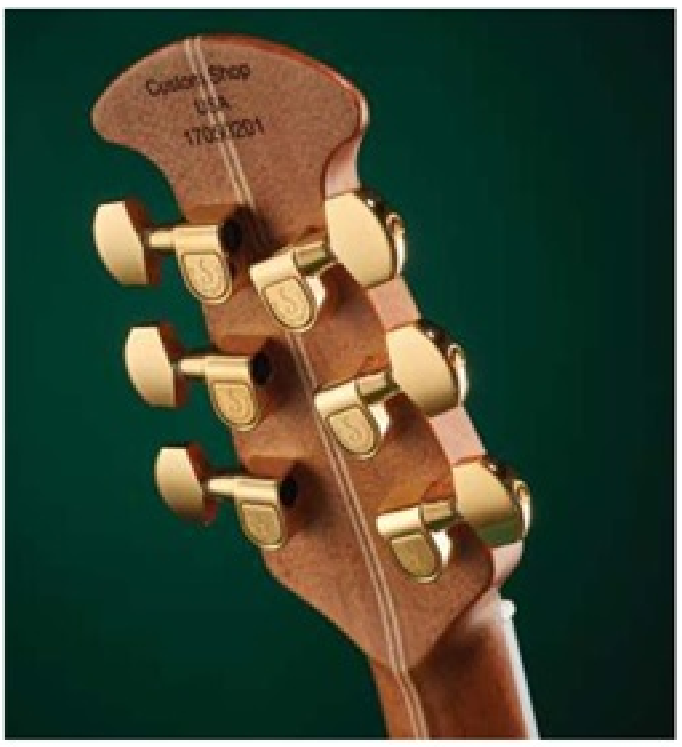
When describing the legacy of the late Glen Campbell and the significance of his relationship with their brand, Darren Wallace, Ovation Guitars operations manager, puts it best: "It is impossible to underestimate Glen Campbell's importance to Ovation. Gretsch Guitars have Chet Atkins; Gibson has Les Paul and Ovation has Glen Campbell."

Reissued in Europe in May, Campbell's backing was indeed priceless after some rocky times for the company in the past few years. Founded by Charles Kaman back in 1965, the Ovation acoustic guitars rose to popularity in the early 80s and were played by many of the great musicians of the time – from John McLaughlin to Bob Marley and Joan Armatrading – and continued strongly until they were sold to Fender in 2006. And then sold again in 2015 to Drum Workshop.

Named after the country singer song-writer in 1968, the original guitar model was made to be lighter than its steel string counterparts, and was known as the Balladeer. The back of the guitar is Ovation's signature bowl-back, or Lyrachord back, which was developed by Kaman (who incidentally is the same Kaman of Kaman helicopters). It is a synthetic material or more specifically a "resin-impregnated silicone fiber", as described in an early sales brochure.

The top is made from grade AAA Sitka spruce and sports a sunburst vintage hue. The finish is gleaming: there's more reflection here than on a freshly-waxed car (though it's actually Gloss Nitro Lacquer). The rosette is decorated with a repeating oak leaf pattern, which has been laser-cut from abalone. The walnut bridge looks natural, almost untreated. Sitting on the glistening solid top, the contrast in textures makes it stand out even more. Encircling the top is a white ABS striped binding with black and white purfling.

Where Glen Campbell's original model had a highly varnished neck, this model has a matt, almost open-pore finish to it. On top of the neck, which is a five-piece mahogany/maple concoction, sits an ebony fingerboard stippled with acrylic pearl diamonds and dots and the final 20th fret is signed-off with Glen Campbell's signature. The headstock is in Ovation's distinctive shape (looking something a little like a semi-duck-billed platypus) and sports Schaller M6 Gold tuners.



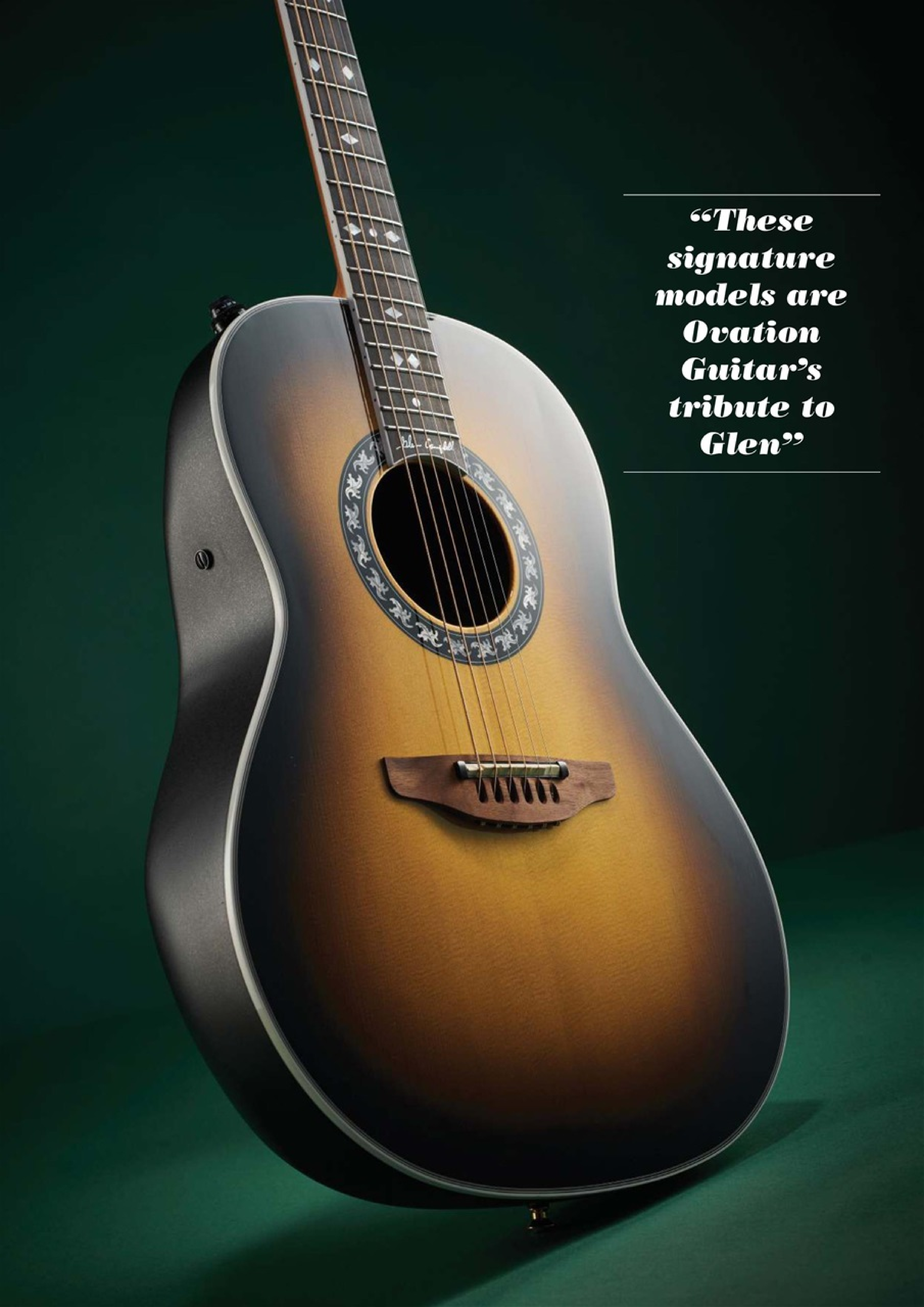
Hidden in the shadows of the guitar you'll find quarter sawn scalloped X-bracing – which is ideal, providing that fuller, more resonant tone in order to complement the natural lightness of sound more commonly associated with spruce tops.

Sitting down to play the guitar there is one obvious benefit to the bowlback and that is the way it moulds into your body as you play: it just seems to naturally fill the void between yourself and the guitar. Playing and standing might be more of a hindrance to players with the more voluminous figure, though.

While your fretboard fingers have light work on the ebony fingerboard, the thumb struggles a little on the steep curve of the reverse side of the neck for melodic playing.

If you like to wrap your thumb around the neck and get into strumming techniques then this is the perfect setup. The width of the neck lets you do this too. Back in the day, the Ovation neck was based around the classical guitar neck, so the nut width would have been even greater at about 52mm, though in this case it is a manageable 43mm.

In order to provide an adequate all-round, well-balanced review I set out to compare it with another bowlback guitar. In the whole of Bristol I only source one such instrument for sale – a bespoke, 1982 Kinkade guitar with a Sitka spruce top and a neck design



"These signature models are Ovation Guitar's tribute to Glen"

based entirely on a Les Paul: a kooky design, but a benchmark nonetheless.

Unplugged it has a clean and understated warmth of tone with almost as much resonance as the Kinkade guitar 35 years its senior, which is impressive to say the least. The mid and treble ranges are strong, as is the bass, although taking the lower E string down to a D magnifies the bass immeasurably. A plucked single notes lasts approximately 19 seconds.

Although my playing will never be quite up to the same standards of Campbell's, as seen in his rendition of 'The William Tell Overture', in which his plectrum work was quite outstanding, I do try my best to replicate as much a sound of his as possible, though it is more akin to a toned down

OVATION GUITARS
GLEN CAMPBELL SIGNATURE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Ovation Guitars
Model: Glen Campbell Signature
RRP: £2,562
Body Size: Mid-depth non-cutaway
Made In: USA
Top: AAA Sitka spruce
Back and sides: Lyrachord, hand-laid
Neck: 5-piece mahogany-maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Bridge Walnut
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 641.35 mm
Electronics: SKM Preamp and OCP1 Original Patented Pickup
Controls: Volume and Tone
Tuners: Schaller M6, Gold
Gig Bag/Case included: USA-made ABS Deluxe Case 9158-0

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Consistency of sound and projection
Cons: An uncomfortable rounded neck
Overall: This guitar is for bowl-back fanatics and mid-to-experienced players

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: 4/5
Sound Quality: 5/5
Overall: 4/5

CONTACT DETAILS

www.gewamusic.com

version of American songwriter Jerry Webb's 'Wichita Lineman'.

My attempts to use a plectrum on this guitar show it to have a strong, full sound with some notable projection. One slight oversight might be the lack of a pick guard, so if you're thinking of making a purchase of this instrument I'd highly recommend getting one – the top is far too pristine to besmirch, especially if you want to give the guitar some welly.

The consistency of tone and balance of sound across the guitar is remarkable. Playing above the soundhole, over the fretboard, even down by the bridge has very little change of tone – it retains its warmth and projection throughout. This is a bonus for players who need that consistency of sound, particularly the more rhythmic player or accompanist. The vibrato is significantly more responsive than on the Kinkade, though not as much as similar priced wooden box guitar counterparts.

The current setup of the guitar has a relatively high action. This really adds to pureness of the sound – it feels and sounds as if there are less buzzes and squeaks compared to other instruments. At the top end of the guitar the higher action makes it a little more tricky for adding extra high licks, (it's comfortable with simple blues licks in the bass) but for strumming in the mid and lower range it feels smooth and clean. A truss rod and supplied key for adjustment allows you to take control of the spacing between guitar and strings.

The volume control and equaliser dials are connected to the same single knob SKM pre-amp, the latter above the other, and rotate independently (well, almost). While the volume turns smoothly up and down the EQ dial catches the volume dial in the lower bass range, so you may inadvertently turn the volume down if you need a lot of bass. Too much treble becomes tinny but it is in the mid to lower-mid range that the guitar produces it's fullest and sweetest tone (which is complementary to the strong mid- to upper range when played acoustically).

This Glen Campbell Signature model may well prove itself to be a strong contender in the market place today and mostly caters for the collector or mid-to-advanced player. Bowl-back guitars might not be the most popular guitar product out there, and while this model isn't cheap at £2,562, it is a convincing statement from Ovation that they are truly back in business. Wallace adds: "These signature models are Ovation Guitar's tribute to Glen, his music and his enduring legacy, of which we are proud to be a part." ■

MARTIN 0-18

Martin are one of the best known and loved acoustic guitar companies in the world. But will this new model live up to the exceptionally high benchmark? Robbie Gladwell finds out

The Martin 0-18 is a parlour-sized acoustic guitar, similar in spec to the 00-18 model but with more attack and upper mids than the 00 model. The design of this guitar incorporates many of the traditional features found on other Martin models, such as the Sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides and the famous spade shaped headstock – you'd know it's a Martin guitar a mile off!

"The construction is superb and the attention to detail is excellent"

The construction and build quality are superb and the attention to detail is excellent. East Indian rosewood has been used for the front of the headstock, which is adorned with the famous Martin & Co. decal. The wood used for the neck is described by Martin as 'selected hardwood'. I must say it looks very much like mahogany to me, being visually identical to the wood used on the back and sides of the instrument. My suspicion is that the description used for the neck timber allows them to make changes in the event of any wood shortages, not to mention saving the rarer timbers for more visual aspects of the instrument. The machine heads are the Grover open back type in nickel plate, similar in appearance to the vintage Waverly heads. The tuning ratio is 18:1 making for smooth accurate tuning. The fingerboard is made from Ebony and is fitted with 20 medium gauge frets and 14 abalone position markers (top and sides). The frets are perfectly seated and very comfortable to play, with no sharp or lifting ends. The fingerboard nut is made from bone and is perfectly fitted and slotted with a comfortable first fret action height – you can easily play a barre 'F' chord without discomfort.

A dovetail joint is used to join the neck to the body. In my opinion this is still the best way to join the two together, even allowing for possible neck pitch problems further down the line. A glued-in neck allows for maximum resonance and transference of energy giving superior sustain.

Many manufacturers use bolt-on necks nowadays and this can bring its own set of problems if not correctly fitted. This would typically present as nodes (lack of resonance) at lower frequencies, which can affect sustain on bottom E or A strings. This certainly isn't the case with this guitar as it has some great sustain characteristics.

The neck shape is interesting in that it isn't the usual 'C' or 'D' shape as found on many guitars. Here's how Martin describes the neck and playability of the 0-18: "The combination of a short expressive 24.9" (632.46mm) scale with a modified low oval neck shape and the high performance parallel taper allows for easy action and fast playability". Ok, you could dismiss this as typical sales talk, but the neck does feel very comfortable, even for the smallest hands. You can very easily play a regular 'D' chord and hold down the F# on the 'E' string with your thumb. The shorter scale helps too, giving rise to a softer feel to the action. The neck is finished with a matt lacquer, which is a typical Martin feature.

The top is made of Sitka spruce, which is reinforced with ¼" X bracing. As mentioned earlier, CF Martin was a major innovator of

the acoustic guitar. The steel-strung guitars we have today wouldn't exist if it wasn't for his ground-breaking ideas.

Around 150 years ago he invented the X bracing system to help reinforce the top of the guitar. This allowed the use of steel strings for the very first time. Before this only fan style bracing was used, which provided more than adequate strength for the gut strings typically used in those days. The old-style gut strings had a much lower tension, as do the nylon strings used for modern classical guitars, which still make use of the traditional fan bracing.

The bracing on modern guitars is often 'scalloped' to allow the top to vibrate freely giving a better bass response. The 0-18 has this feature but the transverse tone bars are un-scalloped allowing for better transmission of tone to other parts of the table. An ebony bridge is fitted along with an intonation compensated bone saddle which has a 16" radius. The intonation is perfect with the string 12-54 gauge as fitted from the factory. Black bridge pins are fitted to compliment the ebony bridge.

The Martin X-Bracing system has never really been improved upon (although many have tried) and is found on almost all steel strung guitars today, irrespective of price!

To compliment the look of the guitar Martin have used a gloss lacquer with an aging toner. Sitka spruce can be almost white in colour, so the use of this lacquer gives it more of a played

MARTIN & CO 0-18

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: C.F. Martin & Co
Model: 0-18
RRP: £2,299
Body Size: Parlour
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Select hardwood
Fingerboard: Ebony with abalone dot inlays
Bridge: Ebony
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 632.46mm
Electronics: Optional
Tuners: Nickel open gear
Gig Bag/Case included: Ply hardshell

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Good looks, well-made and a great tone
Cons: The neck timber is indeterminate, although not necessarily that important
Overall: It gets the thumbs up from me. I'm a great lover of Parlour size acoustic guitars as they don't spill over the tonal range when playing along with other acoustic instruments

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

CONTACT DETAILS

www.martinguitar.com

"This would make a good recording guitar – you don't have any of those nasty bass resonances to contend with"

in look. They've used a multiple black/white binding for the top and a single black binding for the back, although on closer inspection the black binding appears to be a dark faux tortoiseshell. The depth of the binding is very narrow, looking almost like a stripe rather than a band, with a width of just 4.5mm. The binding size actually suits the look of the instrument perfectly. I love the look of the Martin teardrop scratchplate – again faux tortoiseshell – but very attractive!

The back and sides are made from a mahogany that closely resembles the Honduran species, although this is extremely unlikely. The back is in two parts with a black stripe down the middle section. It appears that Martin still split their logs in the time-honoured fashion (rather than sawing) as the figuring on the back extends across both parts. The back is reinforced internally with four lateral spruce braces. Both the back and the sides are finished with a faultless high gloss lacquer.

The 0-18 has an unexpectedly balanced tone for its size with a pleasant emphasis on the upper mid frequencies. This makes it perfect for both strumming and fingerpicking. The projection is excellent, with a good volume when strummed and great definition for fingerpicking. I would imagine that it would make a good recording guitar as you don't have any of the nasty bass resonances to contend with. I dabble in most styles of music and apart from banging out the big loud ballads (think 'Times Like These' by the Foo Fighters) it works well and sounds great. If I had to have just one acoustic guitar this would be a strong contender, especially if it had been fitted with a pickup. I could then happily use it for gigging and touring!

The playability, action and the feel of the neck is very good. If this is typical of the Martin factory setup then I think the majority of, if not all, players, will be happy with it. ■

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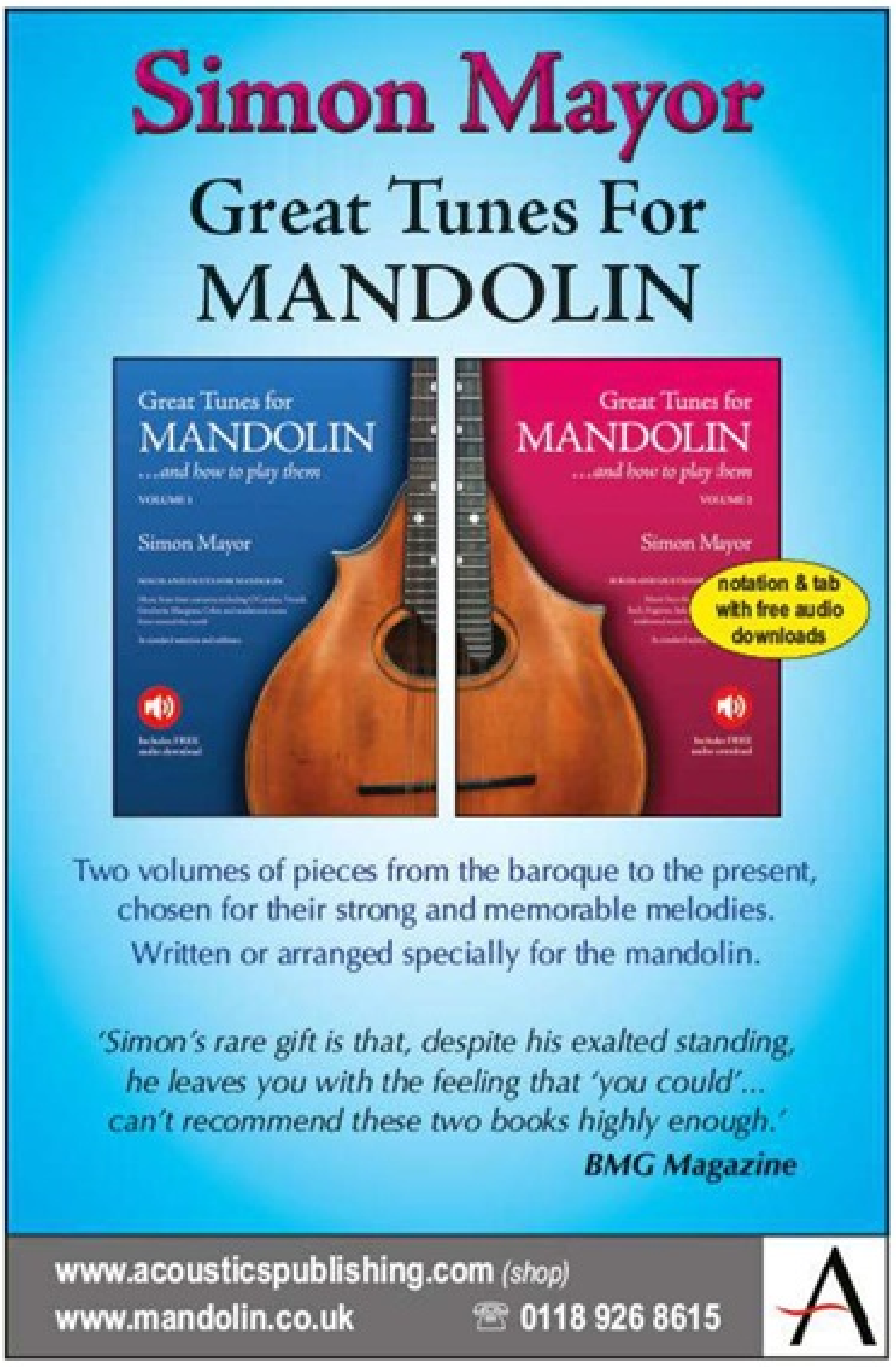
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AUDEN JULIA

Huw Hopkins takes a stroll down memory lane with Auden's latest concert-sized Julia

Don't you love that feeling when everything just clicks into place? Unwrapping the Auden Julia is exactly that – it feels right! A perfect fit, beautiful looks, ready to play straight out of the box – this could be love at first sight.

"While I prefer blondes, it's hard to deny my inner bluesman's attraction to this"

BUILD QUALITY

Upon opening the dull bronze locks on the brown leather hardcase, which features cream-coloured string sewn in around the edges, this Julia almost blends into the dark fur lining.

The subtle colour is described as Tobacco: barely noticeable in a darkened room but when the light bounces off the AAA cedar top, it looks like someone has lit a fire inside the guitar's hollow body. The warm sunburst fades into satin black toward the neck, where the top feels like silk despite its limited lacquering. While I tend to prefer blondes, it's hard to deny my inner bluesman's attraction to the Auden.

The Julia's back and sides are made from African mahogany, bound together by maple lines. There's also a neat maple circle around the soundhole. The same mahogany is used, presumably to keep costs down, on the neck, but it's quite nice to know that the majority of the guitar could be from the same tree. The joint differs, made from dovetail and hide glue.

The strings are kept in place by a beautiful ebony bridge, and the saddle is a mix, again perhaps to save cost, of bone and composite. It does the job well, to the point that strings felt secure during tightening and loosening. Along the 22-fret fingerboard is an ebony top that makes hitting the right notes easy. Without the guitar being a cutaway, notes beyond the 15th fret are more difficult to reach, but this guitar wasn't made for solos.

At the other end of the neck and headstock, the word Auden sits atop the guitar like a king looking down upon its glorious realm. The strings arch over a bone nut and around some beautifully chromed Schertler machine heads, which are neatly spaced enough that you don't knock another one out of tune if you have to remove another by repetitively twisting its neighbour.

Strapping the guitar, for those odd performers who like to stand up when they play, is easy. The lug on the bottom of the body doubles as a jack input should you want to use the Schertler Lydia preamp and play through an amplifier or sound system. You attach the other end of the strap to a lug that appears slightly on the underside of the neck joint. It really is well placed and fits quite superbly, which is more than you can say for a lot of acoustics that so often overlook this.

SOUND QUALITY

Remember when I was talking about the perfect fit? This is why. I've been reviewing guitars for a while now, but I don't think I've ever felt so at ease with one like I did so quickly with Auden's Julia. At 1,000mm long, from head to base, every element of

the guitar is reachable, from its head to jack input. For a singer-songwriter – which is what I once claimed to be – the neck width at nut of 43mm puts the space between top and bottom Es at 38mm, which is perfect for quick transition between chords. Yet, at the other end, the right hand is playing those same strings across a space of 52mm, meaning the chubby-handed fingerstylers don't get in their own way.

While sitting down, the guitar's body fits perfectly. The waist of 231mm dips in at the perfect angle from the widest part of the 365mm belly, and eases out to the shoulders to create a beautiful little concert – it may be small, but, boy, does it sing.

A firm strum of your favourite chord should produce a great balance of lows, mids and highs from the soundhole, but this goes one step further. I played several rhythm songs on the lower strings and found no problems palm muting as the notes played true. Even when put to the test on a more delicate tune like 'Yesterday' by The Beatles, my fingers seemed to fall into the correct placement and plucking motion.

The Julia is so easy to play, I've started looking at my personal collection of instruments and realised there's a big gaping hole that could easily be filled by an Auden.

When you consider the asking price for a guitar such as this, I'd be happy to pay more than £1,500. Sure, Auden may have cut a few corners, but it isn't visible in the aesthetics, and my enjoyment while playing it is worth that cost alone. But don't worry, you don't have to fork out an excessive amount. This flawless guitar appears to boast a standard RRP of just £999.

"I've reviewed guitars for a while now, but I've never felt so at ease with one as this"

CONCLUSION

This is by no means an entry-level guitar, but for the good player who wants to take their songwriting to the next level, this is certainly an inspiring one and will get you playing old chords in new ways. It doesn't break the bank and is light enough to be thrown over your shoulder for an extended setlist. For me, the light frame on Auden's Julia, amounting to around 1.6kg, is a huge benefit. I sense that we'll be seeing plenty of them at open mic nights around the country pretty soon. ■

AUDEN JULIA

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Auden
Model: Julia
RRP: £999
Body Size: Concert
Made In: Northamptonshire, UK
Top: AAA cedar
Back and Sides: African mahogany
Neck: African mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Bridge: Ebony
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 625mm
Electronics: Schertler Lydia preamp
Tuners: Schertler
Gig Bag/Case included: Brown leather hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Perfect size, weight and shape
Cons: Would have been happy to pay a little extra for some smaller detailed upgrades
Overall: If you want to write songs and play them in front of people, this is for you

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: 4/5
Sound Quality: 5/5
Overall: 5/5

CONTACT DETAILS

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YAMAHA A5R ARE

Alun Lower gets gig-ready with this fancy flagship model from the newly-revamped, performance-focused A series

Yamaha is a company that finds itself in the enviable position of possessing considerable prowess and gravitas in just about every sector they've ever taken an interest in. The guitar side of the company is no exception, with some exceptional instruments at every single price point pushing the boundaries of craftsmanship, value, design and innovation. It's a typically Japanese approach in that it places great care in the details while never losing sight of the bigger picture. Whether it's an F310 propped up in the corner of a teenager's bedroom or a coveted, hand-crafted LL56 nestled in its hardcase like expensive jewellery, Yamaha's guitars serve their intended purpose with aplomb and have fans from every walk of life and musical niche. For me, I've always had a real affinity with the A series, with its focus towards gigging musicians and home recording enthusiasts. I've reviewed both the A1 and A2 models in the past and found them to be near enough the perfect guitars for the mid-range and upper-mid-range price brackets, so I was already very excited to check out the newest addition to the family.

BUILD QUALITY

Interestingly, the A5 is actually based very closely on the limited edition A6 that the company introduced in 2015, which took the winning foundation laid down by the A3 and A1 models and upped the production values beyond their already impressive levels, with the flagship version handcrafted in Yamaha's Hamamatsu factory in Japan. In terms of the raw ingredients, what you have here is a familiar cutaway dreadnought (or 'Western Body Cutaway' in Yamaha's official blurb), fashioned from a gorgeous, richly-coloured rosewood back and sides and topped with a vintage natural-tinted Sitka spruce top treated with Yamaha's Acoustic Resonance Enhancement system (or A.R.E), a process that aims to create a desirable 'played-in' or aged tone in a brand new instrument.

There's a lot of scientific talk about cellulose and hemicellulose that we could go into, but essentially what you need to know is that this treatment affects the wood at a cellular level to theoretically take away the hardness and rigidity over years of playing, which results in a more mature and open tone right from day one. Under the hood, the A5R also sports scalloped bracing to get the most out of the treated top and to give greater volume and projection. Elsewhere on the body there are plenty of lovely touches that give the guitar that little extra bit of class, like the mahogany and cream binding, and the soundhole rosette, featuring some intricate rosewood and mahogany woodwork.

The neck is constructed from African mahogany, and like the more affordable A series models features a 'hand-rolled' ebony fingerboard. It sounds a little gimmicky but in use the neck is really very easy to manoeuvre around. Coupled with the fact that the fret finishing is easily the best I've played on an acoustic in the last year at least, it makes for an acoustic that still feels like an acoustic, but can almost be played as easily as an electric. I don't want the dreaded 'e' word to cause any alarm, though – just play one and see for yourself.

The overall vibe of the A5R is very much a case of 'vintage modern'. Ergonomically and functionally the guitar feels very modern indeed, but details like the tinted finish, cross fret inlays, open-gear tuners and retro tortoiseshell pickguard keep the guitar grounded within its ancestry. It's an approach that many guitars attempt, and success varies wildly, but here it's done well and I can easily see guitarists from all preferences finding something to like. As you'd expect from a high-end Yamaha, the overall construction is flawless, and despite my very best efforts I can't find anything to complain about. That isn't completely subjective, anyway.

Of course, a big part of the A5R's appeal is in the electronics package. After all, this is a guitar that's built for gigging and recording, so it would be remiss of Yamaha not to pay its dues on this front. The guitar comes equipped with Yamaha's System71 SRT2 electronics package, a system that offers two distinct microphone

modelling modes to simulate a studio recording environment. Four very minimal (and, er, totally unlabelled) controls offer you control over a myriad of functions. The top-most control is for volume, primarily, but also has an LED indicator that indicates which microphone model is currently selected, whether the AFR (feedback reduction) function is being applied, or if the battery is low. The two middle controls look after the bass and treble frequencies, with the left (bass) control also doubling up as an activation switch for the AFR system. Finally, the bottom control manages the blend between the simulated microphone and piezo signals, with a press of the switch flipping between two microphone models (condenser and ribbon). In a further effort to curb unwanted feedback, they also supply a soundhole cover in the package.

SOUND QUALITY

Acoustically the A5R is a delight. Whether the ARE process makes the guitar sound mature beyond its years is a topic I'm sure could be debated endlessly, but certainly from my point of view the general tone is extremely well balanced, full-voiced and rich across the tonal spectrum. Where some spruce/rosewood guitars can sound very piano-like at a first play, with bright, clear trebles and a clanging, crisp low end, the A5R sounds somewhat less polarizing across the spectrum. All those qualities are there of course, but it just blends that little bit differently and to my ear that is indeed the hallmark of a 'played-in' guitar. The guitar ticks every box you could want – the sustain seems to last for days, with the harmonics bounding around beautifully as chords ring out around your ears. Note that a mahogany version of the A5 is also available, but to my mind the sheer clarity and definition of rosewood is the perfect partner for a guitar that is designed with the stage and studio in mind. But for those that want a little more 'boom' in their bass, the mahogany could be a good option as well.

"The sustain seems to last for days, with harmonics bounding around beautifully as the chords ring out"

Plugged in, and using the condenser mic as the starting point, the acoustic tone of the A5 is carried across very well indeed. The blend control is vital to get the best out of the tone; I found it best to start with a purely mic-based tone before introducing the pickup signal bit-by-bit until I hit a sweet spot. It's crisp, clear and very modern-sounding, with an almost hi-fi like quality to it. Switching to the ribbon model adds a more vintage vibe, rounding out the tone a little and softening the harsher edges of that spruce/rosewood combo. Both sounds are infectiously usable, and it'll be down to your own style to determine which mode best suits your approach.

CONCLUSION

As with the other guitars in Yamaha's A series, I've come away completely charmed by the A5R. The original models are still fantastic instruments in their own right, but for more well-heeled buyers, the A5R takes the formula up a notch to offer a guitar that excels in virtually every scenario and feels like a truly luxurious instrument that you will treasure for many years to come. This is one of the most playable, functional and rewarding acoustics I've played in recent times, and it deserves to be on your 'must-try' list if you're in the market for a serious instrument that covers all the bases for recording and gigging. ■

YAMAHA A5R ARE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Yamaha
Model: A5R ARE
RRP: £1,279
Body Size: Dreadnought cutaway
Made In: Japan
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Solid rosewood
Neck: 3-ply African mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Bridge: Ebony/TUSQ
Nut width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Weight: 2.1kg
Electronics: System71 Preamp & SRT2 Piezo Pickup
Controls: Volume, Mic Select, Tone and Blend
Tuners: Gotoh Open Gear Chrome
Gig Bag/Case included: Hard case included

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Superb acoustic and electro tones, and stunning build quality
Cons: None
Overall: The quintessential electro-acoustic

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★★
Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

https://uk.yamaha.com/

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FAITH NAKED SATURN

Fancy getting Naked with Patrick James Eggle for only £479? Joel McIver investigates

The renowned luthier Patrick James Eggle is known for making wondrous guitars under his own name at accountant-terrifying prices. His electric models regularly exceed £3,000, while you'll also pay the thick end of that sum for one of his higher-spec acoustics. However, if your wallet doesn't stretch quite that far but you've always hankered after an Eggle-designed instrument, look no further than Faith Guitars.

Although some of their instruments will set you back four figures, their Indonesia-built Naked range, aimed at the low- to mid-budgeted player, promise to deliver high performance at a fraction of his PJE-branded guitars. This month, we've got a Naked Saturn, retailing at a manageable £479, for review. Let's have a play (clothing optional).

Straight out of the box – a hard case will cost you extra, presumably because Faith are trying to keep costs to a minimum – the Saturn looks and feels terrific. The simple two-stage satin finish is key to both elements, neither covering the Engelmann spruce top and mahogany sides with too impenetrable a lacquer or diminishing the slinky feel of the neck.

Details are clearly high on Faith's agenda, with the overall design – a familiar but manageable dreadnought body – functioning as it should from the off. A front strap button is located on the underside of the neck join, meaning (in theory) that your guitar should stay attached at that end, a highly player-friendly consideration that reveals the luthiers' understanding of guitarists' needs. The machine heads, Faith's own, look affordable but function smoothly and solidly enough. Although the bridge isn't remarkable, it's reassuringly familiar, and its ebony pins add an aesthetic touch.

Playability and tone range, achieved without too much of an outlay, have clearly been high on the list of objectives for the designers. On Faith's website, Eggle breaks down the frequency curve that he's aiming for with these models – a scooped 'smile' – and while this might imply that mids aren't the strongest tonal focus here, there are plenty available.

Truly glassy highs aren't really this guitar's province, it has to be said, but get yourself some new strings, dig in with a pick close to the bridge and you should achieve a perfectly workable amount of top end. The same goes for bass: again, a guitar at this price point and composed of these materials won't be making your audience's stomachs quiver, but the low end which is there is perfectly adequate.

So where does the Saturn excel? Its neck dimensions are very player-friendly indeed, with an action that isn't so low as to be invisible but which permits easy position changes during fingerpicking and flat-picking. On top of this, the individual string voices are clear and the body pushes out a reasonable amount of volume, coupled with real clarity. Barre chords are made easy and fun, while those of the folkie and/or indie persuasion will be rewarded with minor sixths and suspended chords that ring out with impressive resonance. Harmonics also spring out clearly and usably.

To use the Saturn fully – and make no mistake, this versatile guitar has plenty of applications – get your Bert Jansch head on and try an alternate tuning such as DADGAD, which sounds divine thanks to the surprisingly big tones of your lowest D. Similarly, tuning everything down a step works beautifully, as the dreadnought body dimensions are big enough to handle the extra low end. In fact, in this range is where the Saturn seems happiest.

Stage performers will, no doubt, be looking for a balanced instrument that sits well against the body and the Saturn is perfectly fine in this area, in part thanks to the cunning placement of the front strap button that we mentioned earlier. The body depth varies from

105mm to 120mm, in other words it isn't the deepest guitar ever made and should be readily strummable on a strap when you're singing your latest ditty on stage.

Beneath the bonnet, you're treated to a bracing system called the Patrick James Eggle X-Brace Design, which sounds impressive even if, like most of us, you have no idea what it actually is. Essentially, as Eggle has explained, this cunning assembly of woods is placed within the body in such a way as to maximise volume and tone while strengthening the body to modern requirements. Again, a system such as this, aligned with a pricetag as reasonable as £479, is quite the eye-opener in today's saturated acoustic guitar market.

Budding Jon Gomms and Andy McKees will be pleased with the durability of the Saturn, which will (all right, should) take most of the abuse handed to it by slap-handed body percussionists with aplomb. The finish of the body is, as we mentioned above, not designed to be especially durable, so don't expect to wait long before it gets distressed if you do elect to get physical with it.

This brings us neatly to the subject of electronics, absent here but available on the Saturn's electro-acoustic sibling for only £50 more. Perhaps there's a psychological barrier at £500 which we're not acknowledging sufficiently, but it seems to us that the inclusion of a pickup for a mere extra half ton is a no-brainer for any musician, whether you're a stage or bedroom performer. Without on-board electronics of any kind, your only option if you want to amplify your playing or introduce effects pedals and software – loopers particularly come to mind – is an external or clipped-on mic, never a perfect solution outside the studio.

"Eggle and Faith are to be congratulated on bringing a guitar of this spec to market for this price"

Despite this observation, Eggle and Faith are to be congratulated on bringing a guitar of this spec to market for this price. I've consistently noted above that it's uncommon to pay £429 for an instrument, even in today's cheap-guitar era, and expect to end up with something of this quality. A quick visit to comparable luthiers (no names, no pack drill) reveals that Saturn-specced guitars are rare for this relatively meagre outlay.

What are the alternatives within the Faith range? Well, we liked the look of the Venus models, especially a single-cutaway electro-acoustic model which they're selling for only £509 – this seems to be a far more roadworthy instrument than the Saturn, and you only need to shell out another £30 for it.

The conclusion? There are no real surprises waiting for you with this instrument, whether you prefer to focus on the quality of the components or the usefulness of the design. However, it's a winner when it comes to picking it up and making actual sounds: you'll definitely struggle to find a guitar at this price that plays so well, offers so much versatility and still has the stamp of one of the world's best-regarded luthiers on it. As for the Saturn's Indonesian provenance, it might be a controversial view to purists, but at this price point you'll never know the difference between this and a UK-made instrument. We are impressed. ■

FAITH NAKED SATURN

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Faith Guitars
Model: Naked Saturn
RRP: £479
Body Size: Dreadnought
Made in: Indonesia
Top: Solid Engelmann spruce
Back and Sides: Solid Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Bridge: Rosewood, ebony pins
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Electronics: Optional
Tuners: Faith Precision Chrome
Gig Bag/Case included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Excellent build quality for this value
Cons: Tone range is adequate rather than astounding
Overall: A decent solution to the problem of an affordable, but Eggle-designed, guitar

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Sound Quality: ★★★☆☆
Overall: ★★★½☆

CONTACT DETAILS

www.faithguitars.com

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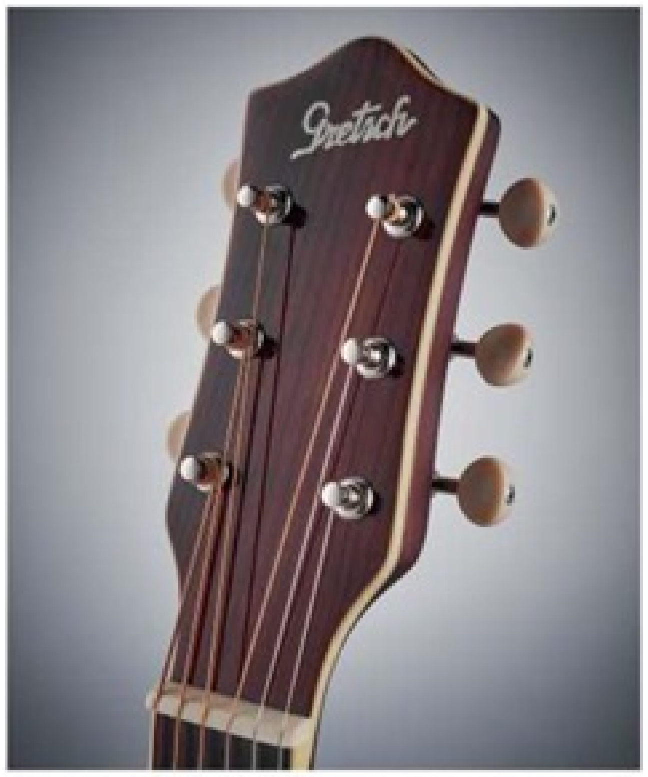

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IN THE WORKSHOP

LINDA MANZER

When it comes to luthiers, Linda Manzer is one of the world's finest; renowned for her arch tops, flat tops and harp guitars, her building skills are well-respected in the modern guitar world. Acoustic caught up with the Canadian to find out what's new

WORDS: EMILY BIELBY

It was while on holiday in the UK with her parents that Toronto-based Linda Manzer first heard the Beatles, a discovery which led to her lifelong love affair with the guitar. "I wanted to play like George Harrison. Mostly I was just really excited by their music and was an honest to goodness screaming Beatle maniac," she admits. "My first guitar was just a prop so that I could play air guitar along with the Beatles but eventually I learnt to play it and started writing my own songs. Thank you Beatles! I was a huge fan of the Beatles and then the North American folk scene of Joni Mitchell, James Taylor and the whole British musical invasion in the 70s. I first became interested in musical instrument making when I went to see Joni Mitchell in concert in the 60s and she was playing a dulcimer and I wanted one."

That was all it took for the Canadian teen to develop an itch for guitar building. "I went to purchase a dulcimer and it was too expensive so the fellow at the music store talked me into buying a kit that I could assemble that was about half the price. From that day forward I started making dulcimers as a hobby," she says, before explaining how her route into luthiery started. "I attended two art colleges and I kept finding myself in the woodworking shop until I decided to formally apprentice with somebody; that person turned out to be Jean-Claude Larrivée. I studied with him between 1974 and 1978 and we built over 1,500 flat top acoustic guitars during that time. In 1978 I struck out on my own and had my own shop shared with a light maker above a pool hall in downtown Toronto. A couple of years later I met James D'Aquisto who invited me to visit him in his shop in Long Island and eventually I ended up studying arch top guitar construction with him in his shop in 1983-84 on a part-time basis. It was an incredible experience working with both of these two master builders."

PAT, PIKASSO AND OTHER STORIES

Conversation quickly moves to design as Linda reveals a little more about her style and inspiration. "My design sense has been inspired by my love of visual art; I went to art colleges and spent a critical time in my youth around very creative people who loved and embraced all forms of the arts." What is it about arch tops that she loves so much? "I enjoy building arch tops because of the challenge; they are more difficult to build and more sensitive to string tension in a similar way that a classical guitar is. A little change in construction can make a

big difference, but I also feel like there's a special musical magic that can only come out of an arch top – if they are designed and set up just right and of course if they're in the hands of the right player." However, arch tops and flat tops are not the only guitars that master luthier Linda is well known for building: the Pikasso guitar, also known as the 'Manzer Wedge' is a harp guitar which caught Acoustic's eye due to the amount of strings it had.

"The Pikasso guitar was made for Pat Metheny; he asked me to make him a guitar with 'as many strings as possible' in 1984. We played around with several ideas but finally settled on the design that seemed possible for me to make and for him to play. The 'Manzer Wedge' came about through a discussion I had with my friend and guitar maker Tony Duggan-Smith. Tony is a terrific idea person. The idea of squeezing the upper bout which is underneath your playing arm and widening it on the knee side was so that the top would lean back and the player would be able to see all the strings. Because there were 42 strings crisscrossing I wanted Pat to be able to look down on the strings instead of across them. It worked but it turned out to be incredibly comfortable as well, so I started doing it on all my guitars."

Since designing the Pikasso guitar, Linda has gone on to design and build about 12 original multi-necked and multi-string harp instruments and has just finished a 50-string instrument for Canadian musician Terry Tufts. In all, she's built probably 25 original guitars for jazz musician Pat Metheny, covering all genres, including some that have never been built before – big, small, harp guitars, sitar guitars, baritone guitars, the list is long. "The thing about working with Pat is he loves to encourage people to push the envelope and he was unbelievably supportive of anything I tried to do. He is a dream to work with," says Linda. "I've also just finished building 30 guitars that Pat and I co-designed to celebrate our 30 years of collaboration and friendship, called the Metheny Manzer series. This guitar series is designed and based on the original first instrument that I made for Pat in 1981. I tried to emulate the vibe of that first guitar by selecting woods I thought would duplicate the sound of that first guitar. Then we added an elaborate hand cut intricate inlay based on Pat's drawings and then some newer design features including the Manzer Wedge. It's a limited signed edition that both Pat and I have signed plus there is a book that accompanies it signed by both of us. The series is almost entirely sold out, there are only a few left."

A DAY IN THE LIFE...

Traditionally, arch top guitars are made with curly maple back and sides with a spruce top. How fussy is Linda with her wood selections? "I have tried different woods for the back such as koa, walnut and for the top, cedar. Really the trick with selecting wood is to just close your eyes – ignore what kind of wood it is and be sensitive to what the potential is. Even if you're using the same species of wood, there are tremendous variations depending on how the wood was cut and how old the tree was. It's an inexact science that requires following your intuition. Over the years I've amassed a really incredible collection of woods that I'm now getting around to using. As unscientific as it sounds, I prefer to buy wood from people I like and trust. I actually think the journey the wood has taken makes a difference. So that's part of what I'm deciding when I'm selecting woods."

A typical Manzer day starts pretty much the same as anyone else's: with a list of things to accomplish that day. She's happy if about half of them get done.

"I usually start doing something easy just to get the motor running, then the challenging stuff, and then the more mundane tasks later in the day when I'm less focused. If I get a second wind, look out! Sometimes if I have intense deadlines I'll work an 18-hour day – I love getting lost in the work. I pinch myself every day that I get to do this for a living. Not only do I get paid to do what I love but the extra reward is I get to be part of somebody else's creative journey. A lot of people ask me if I get sad when a guitar leaves my studio after all the hours I put into it and at first I used to have trouble letting them go but now I realise the moment they go out the door, that's the beginning of their life."

How should someone enquire about a custom order? "The first thing I want to know is what their intention is acoustically: the most important thing about a guitar is how it sounds. Secondly, you want it to technically work so it's easy to play and suits their playing style with string tension, neck shape, body size and this is where I really need their input. The third and least important – but most fun – aspect is what it looks like; where I get to have fun and play. I love designing guitars so this is my favourite part; deciding which woods to assemble to get the sound I want, drawing shapes, lots of design on paper – this part can be very creative. One of the most rewarding aspects for me is carving necks, even though you can have measurements to guide you – it's all about the feel. I love it when you get it just right. The hardest part is the finish. Every guitar maker on the planet will tell you they've had nightmare scenarios with trying to make a guitar as shiny as possible – you can get everything just right and find one little blemish that may force you to refinish the entire guitar." ■

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THINKING **INSIDE** THE BOX

Nick Benjamin brings us part two of his 'Functional or Just For Fun?' series. This month, we talk fanned-frets: what, how and why?

WORDS: NICK BENJAMIN

Last month I started delving into the wonderful world of guitar features and began with the arm bevel. This month I'll move onto another feature I'm asked about quite often: 'fanned-frets'. This most commonly used name for the feature is the US registered trademark of Novax Guitars and the concept was also protected (to some extent) by a US patent until fairly recently. Other common names for this special layout of frets and strings include 'multi-scale' and 'compound-scale'. The earliest known examples of the idea come from the late 16th century. However, the US patent office is unconcerned with such things and has granted numerous patents relating to the idea dating back to at least 1900. What is certain is that Ralph Novak of Novax Guitars has developed the idea very thoroughly and it has become a much requested acoustic guitar feature – despite being initially developed for electric guitars by Ralph starting in the late 70s.

A MATTER OF SCALE (LENGTH)

If you aren't already familiar with this layout, take a look at the accompanying pictures and you'll see straightaway! Essentially, most fanned-fret guitars have a layout that makes the strings longer and longer as we go from the top, or treble strings, across to the bass strings. All steel-string guitars have a slightly angled saddle to improve intonation. But to achieve a fanned-fret we are actually changing the 'scale length' as we go from top to bottom and both the nut and bridge are generally angled such that the bottom string has a significantly longer scale length than the top string.

The frets are then fanned out to put them in the right place for the differing scale lengths at each extreme of the fretboard. This means that they are closer together on the treble side and more spaced out on the bass. The strings in between the two outer ones are naturally spaced out evenly in terms of scale length and fret positions as we go across the fretboard.

'Scale length' is the total length of a string from nut to saddle except we usually move the nut and saddle positions slightly to make the guitar play in tune, as I mentioned a couple of months ago. So the scale length is actually a measurement that the fret spacings are based upon before 'compensation' is added to the nut and saddle positions. The slight angle of the saddle on most steel-string guitars is part of this compensation repositioning. Non fanned-fret guitars all have a single scale length, i.e. all strings are the same length (if we ignore compensation aspects) and this length varies to some extent with different guitar designs. Most designers choose a scale length based on traditional parameters, with steel-string guitars ranging between around 625-650mm and classical guitars between 640-660mm. There are various 'standard' lengths that have been used by well known manufacturers which I won't go into now but, essentially, certain tonal aspects are ascribed to longer or shorter scale length guitars and by manipulating the scale length we can try to dial in certain tonal aspects of a guitar.

SETTING THE TONE

Of course, the sound of a guitar has many different contributors: wood types, body shape and size, strutting, and so on. Scale length is only one aspect of sound shaping available as part of the design of a given model. But within the unrelenting quest for improvement, simply changing the overall scale length in the same way for all the strings can be limiting for some designers and the option of gaining differing tonality from bass to treble via varying scale length proportionally using fanned-frets makes sense to some makers.

"THE THINKING BEHIND FANNED-FRETS IS TO GAIN TREBLES THAT ARE AS FAT AS POSSIBLE WHILE KEEPING BASS NOTES CLEAR, DEEP AND SEPARATE"

Tonality is a very subjective thing but the way I describe the change in tone from a longer scale to a shorter one is that, in comparison, a long scale guitar tends to have a more piano-like tone: deep and clear and more scooped in the lower mid-range. A short scale guitar tends to be fatter and more mid-range strong, with less brightness and depth.

There are many factors at play, so it's absolutely possible to have a long scale guitar with a very fat tone or a short scale guitar with a brighter less chunky tone. Guitar designs are like recipes with different ingredients – you can balance the elements to accentuate or control different tonal aspects.

The thinking behind fanned-fret guitars is to gain trebles that are as fat as possible while keeping bass notes clear, deep and separate. We can make a guitar that has a generally fat tone for great treble notes but the basses may then sound too muddy. We can build a clear sounding guitar but the trebles may then sound too thin, even though the basses sound magnificent. So by using the variable scale we can try to dial in the balance we desire without compromise, in theory at least.

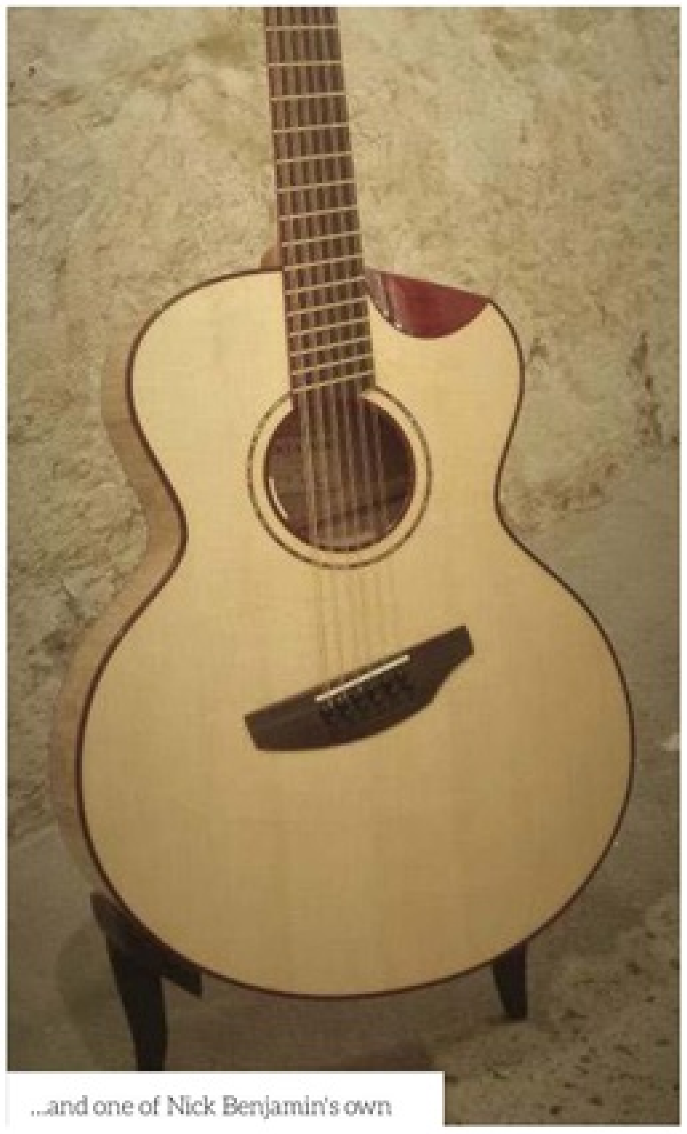
Guitar design and, perhaps more importantly, string design has evolved to a fairly narrow range of scale lengths and to a 'standard' tuning that string manufacturers expect you to stick to at least reasonably closely. As we go from high to low pitches the plain unwound wire or nylon strings we usually use for treble strings become very thick and inflexible with reduced power and horrible sounding out-of-tune overtones if we try to use the larger diameters required to get a suitable tension at lower pitches. So wound strings are used which allow increased flexibility due to a relatively flexible inner core with weight added by the outer spiral windings. As we go lower still, double (or more) winding layers may be required to keep flexibility in bass register instruments. Longer scale lengths will increase the tension of a given string or allow us to use a thinner more flexible one and both of these changes can be beneficial for lower notes while a shorter scale can lower the tension or allow a heavier gauge string to be used which can also have its benefits, perhaps for the treble end.

TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY?

So, is a fanned-fret guitar an improved guitar? Will the basses and trebles sound 'better' than a standard guitar? Of course we can change the tension and tone of a standard guitar's strings by using different gauges and many of us do by swapping to higher or lower tension sets or making custom sets for new tunings. This can be enough for many people when they're trying to dial in the sound they're after. Long scale lengths on bass strings can help keep the tone crisp and reduce out of tune harmonics – but the nature of the geometry of a fanned-fret guitar generally means you naturally end up plucking higher up the length of the bass strings nearer their centres, giving a warmer tone that can cancel the benefits; unless you twist your hand to get the ideal plucking position on fingers and thumb. The gradually changing angle of the frets can echo the way your fretting hand's angle changes as you pivot from your elbow going up and down the fretboard. So, for some, fanned-frets are an ergonomic benefit. As with all the features I describe each month, it all depends on your playing style, sitting position and taste.

I've made quite a few guitars with this feature, using a fairly subtle 20mm difference between top and bottom scales. These guitars give good ergonomic performance, can stop your thumb plucking position becoming compromised, and can add a little brilliance and separation to the low end, without putting the bridge at too crazy an angle. I won't be making them a standard feature on my guitars and wouldn't play the blues on one (wouldn't seem right!) but I like them and they may work for you: try one and see! ■

The bridge on a Wee Lowden 35 fanned-fret acoustic guitar



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GARRETT WALL

STYLE… (FOLK/ROOTS)

I'm 48, live in Madrid, and am the lead singer, acoustic guitarist and songwriter for Track Dogs. The band comprises myself, Robbie K Jones (vocal, cajón, banjo), Howard Brown (vocal, trumpet, percussion) and Dave Mooney (vocal, bass, mandolin). Our line-up came out of a desire for something different, more minimalistic. We've released two albums so far. Our songs tend to deal with human stories, musings on life and relationships. The overall theme of our recently released third album, *Serenity Sessions*, might be described as human frailty and uncertainty, but it's also a celebration of our universal 'face' when dealing with the vagaries of life. 'So Much Dust' [featured on *Acoustic*'s July issue CD] sums up all of the above in one song; it also captures our love of mixing styles, tempos and instrumentation. It was on the Irish national playlist for 10 weeks, which was pretty wow! When composing, I write mainly on the guitar, but my Brian May ukulele is becoming a great writing instrument and features heavily in songs for the next album. My guitar is an Avalon Legacy series L32CE full body, cutaway, semi-acoustic with a Fishman Pro Blend pickup and Mexican shell inlay around the sound hole. Its huge sound has been intrinsic in creating the Track Dogs sound, as it's the main chordal instrument in the band; equally great acoustic and plugged in. I normally DI via the PA, nothing fancy. I mainly use a pick for live shows, but combine pick and fingerstyle when recording. I mainly use two alternative tunings: open C or tuning the low E to D. We're currently recording our next album and hope to release the first track, 'The Deep End', in October. Before that, we'll tour the UK, with more dates to be announced.

www.trackdogsmusic.com

© Dan Millard

HARRI ENDERSBY

STYLE… (MODERN FOLK)

I'm a 24-year-old songwriter and musician living in Durham. My music is eclectic, pulling inspiration from traditional and modern folk music, along with influence from electronic, country and instrumental genres. I also love singing, and harmonisation has been integral to my songwriting. I find it satisfying to record layers of my own voice to build intensity, atmosphere and emphasis. My songs are mostly inspired by people and places that are important to me. My debut album, *Homes/ Lives*, is actually about my husband, Rich Marsh, an amazing guitarist who plays and writes with me. It's never felt natural for me to write 'romantic' songs, so the album's more a reflection on how much I love and appreciate our life together. The album starts with acoustic, stripped-back tracks, and progresses to fuller instrumentation. I didn't want it to be determined by genre, and the gradual inclusion of electronic influences happened quite naturally. 'Stay Awhile' is probably my favourite track. It was while writing this song that I started experimenting with instruments, and I enjoy playing an acoustic version of this song at gigs. I've been gigging mostly for the past few years with my trusty Yamaha APX500III. It's been such a reliable guitar – the neck is nice and slim, and it's so comfortable to play. But I've just bought an electro-acoustic Faith Venus Mahogany guitar and I'm finding it very hard to put down. It's a real gem. Being mahogany, it has such a warm and rich tone and it sounds gorgeous in open tunings – I most often play in DADDAD or DADF#AD. I feel extremely clumsy with a pick, so it's always fingerpicking. I'm currently working on a live set for a forthcoming UK tour in November of this year. I don't ever want to be complacent, and strive to make better music each time I bring out a record or do a live gig.

www.harriendersby.com

MERLYN DRIVER

STYLE… (FOLK/WORLD)

A musician and part-time ethnomusicologist, I'm originally from Orkney, but am now based in London. I'm definitely influenced and inspired by the folk music of Orkney, but I also like to incorporate elements from other genres and traditions from around the world. After moving to the Scottish mainland to study anthropology at the University of St Andrews, I travelled to the Norwegian Arctic in 2011 to study the music of the indigenous Sámi people. I'm particularly interested in their traditional vocal art form called joik. I started writing songs about ten years ago and have just released my first EP, *This Is The Corner Of A Larger Field*. It has that sense of being a starting point, but in my mind it's also about the untapped potential of an ecological outlook where we consider ourselves part of nature, rather than outside it. It was produced by BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards winner Ben Walker. I loved working with him, and also with Colin Bass, of Camel, who contributed towards some of the production. My favourite track is probably 'The Descent'. It's one of the first songs I ever wrote that I was truly happy with, but I've shaken things up a bit on the EP by collaborating with Sámi Joik vocalist Marja Mortensson and saxophonist Mike Wilbur, of Moon Hooch. My guitar is a Tanglewood Evolution TW28 CSN acoustic, which was prepared for some of the tracks by placing metal bird identification rings around some of the strings, and adding a modified West African buzzing rattle to the headstock. You can hear the effect on 'The Wild Man Warms'. I've played guitars worth thousands, and I prefer mine. It's got a nice smooth action. I've recently bought and installed an M1 Active pickup by LR Baggs, which I love. I play fingerstyle. I've never enjoyed using a pick – whenever I do, I feel like I have a welly boot on my hand. I use open D quite a bit, as well as drop D – and other tunings that I haven't yet attempted to identify. The most important thing I've learnt as a musician is that learning never stops. I'm completely self-taught and still don't know what I'm doing half the time.

My debut EP was released in May 2017 and has received national radio play from BBC 6 Music and BBC Radio Scotland. It was produced by BBC Folk Awards winner Ben Walker (Josienne Clarke & Ben Walker, Oh Sister, Jinnwoo) and Colin Bass (9Bach, Etran Finatawa, Krar Collective) and features guest appearances by the Sámi joiker Marja Mortensson, Michael Wilbur from the Brooklyn-based band Moon Hooch, and several other collaborators from the UK and further afield.

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SHARON SHANNON

SACRED EARTH

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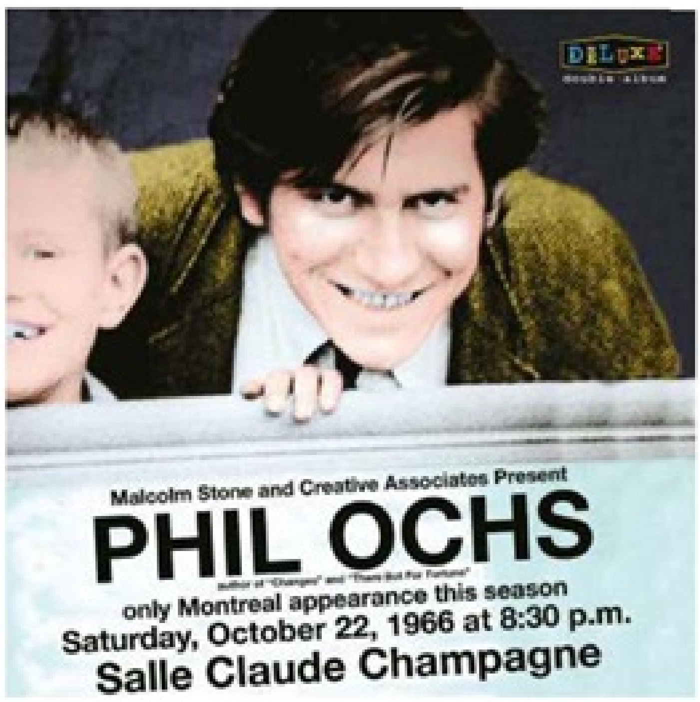
Whether gigging with the Waterboys or working with Nigel Kennedy on his Hendrix suite, original Galway girl Sharon Shannon is back. Now with Justin Adams in the producer's chair, this is an album that careers stylistically all over the globe – and is all the better for it. 'Rusheen Bay' is introduced by Adams' spiky African guitar lines, before developing into an Irish jig. The title track a cinematic piece with echoes of Bourbon Street. 'Pull Out The Stops' is a dance tune that recalls Sharon's native Co. Clare. The venerable Finbar Furey steps up for a lazy Tex Mex take of 'He'll Have To Go', then it's down to Lafayette with 'Let's Go'. Galway jig fans may hate it, but it's a truly fine album nonetheless. **JP**

BIG JOE WILLIAMS

SOUTHSIDE BLUES

WWW.WIENERWORLD.COM

The Fickle Pickle, in Chicago, was a weekly bash organised by the late Mike Bloomfield. It was a cosy club where white blues lovers could experience the real deal without having to venture out of their comfort zones. Of course, such places could neutralise the visceral performances they were supposed to show off. Not so with Big Joe. Recorded in 1963, the King Of The Nine String guitar romps through a cracking set like he's hunkered down on Highway 61 swilling moonshine. Stomping juke joint favourites like 'Don't Want No Big Fat Woman' and 'Sloppy Drunk' will make you want to push back the sofa and break open the whiskey. **JP**



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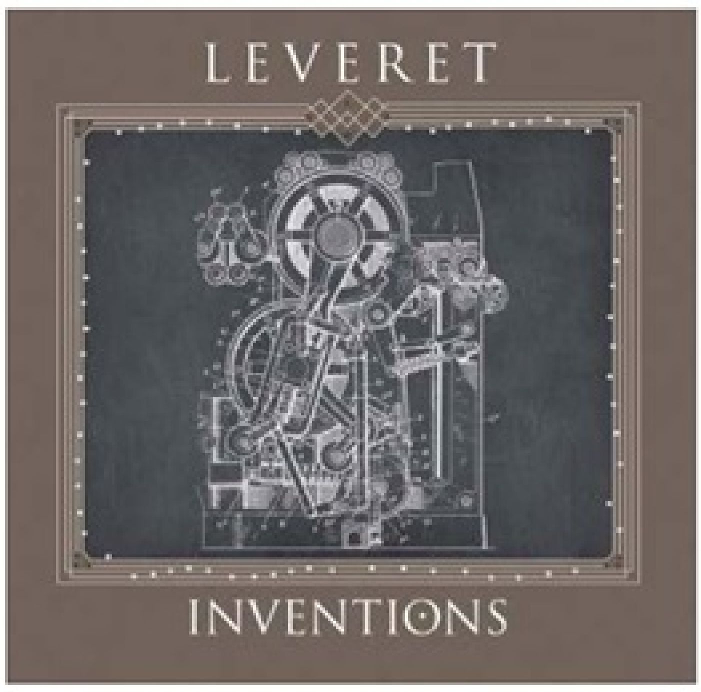
"I don't want the world to be left in the hands of the Hitlers," Phil Ochs once wrote. He died in 1976, aged just 35, always the outsider. Ochs never shirked to muddy the waters with songs about the assassination of John F. Kennedy, 'Crucifixion', or Kentucky coal miner strikes and Mississippi Civil Rights. Left wing heroes were his stock in trade, songs often so acerbic that even Dylan withered in comparison. But he craved the main stream acceptance of his peers, something that never came his way. This double album recorded in 1966 contains most of his finest moments, and is a priceless musical time capsule of the work of a man who was the ultimate 'protest singer'. **JP**



LEVERET

INVENTIONS

WWW.LEVERETBAND.COM

This is the third album by folk super group Leveret. Comprising ex-Bellowhead fiddler Sam Sweeney, the Hendrix of the melodeon Andy Cutting, and concertina wizard Rob Hadron, the guys weave intricate tunes for their wheezing accordion and chirruping melodeon. With abstract names like 'Grenville Morris' and 'Down To The Woodpile', this is the kind of stuff you'd hear outside the Dog and Duck when the Morris dancers are in town. Now, in a live situation Leveret do apparently rip it up. But ultimately it's music for the converted, and like listening to the shipping forecast, grinds on to the point where you just wish it would stop. **JP**

HARD WORKING AMERICANS

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

WWW.THEHARDWORKINGAMERICANS.COM

A believer in Woody Guthrie's maxim that music should 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable', East Nashville's very own joker Todd Snider returns with this live set. Recorded in front of one of those whooping American audiences we'd all die to play for, from the moment the band kick off with the adrenaline-fuelled 'Mission Accomplished', the album surges along a manic punk sensibility with road-tested anthems like the hilarious 'Is This Thing Working' and 'Ascending Into Madness'. It's old school rock 'n' roll in a world of serious young men hunched over synths. We could all use this. **JP**

ED DUPAS

TENNESSEE NIGHT

WWW.EDDUPAS.COM

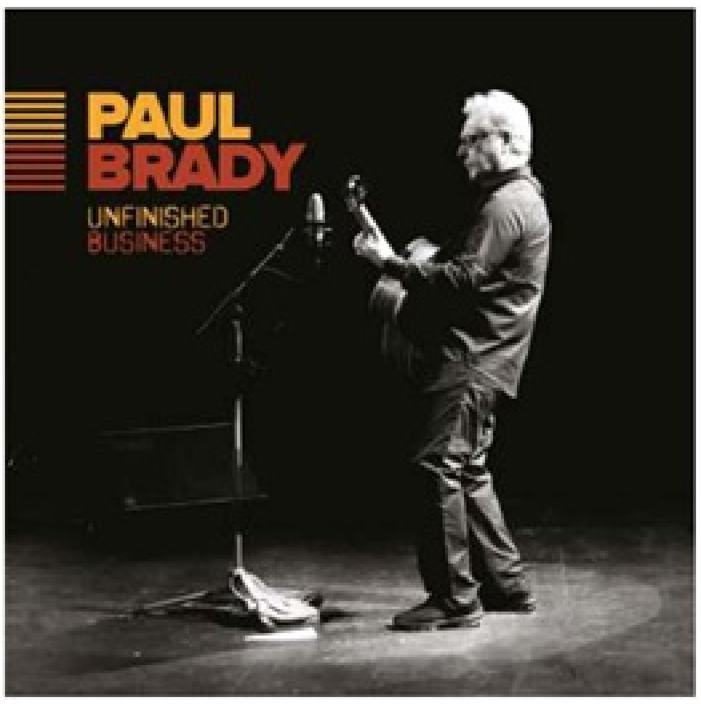
There's no shortage of great Americana heading our way these days, so it takes something just a little bit special to stand out. Ed Dupas is that man that manages, though. In one sense there's nothing new here; the common themes of unrequited love, lonesome highways and broken hearts all figure. The gentle acoustic 'Do It For Me' is a confessional song of leaving and lost love, on 'Up Ahead' he sings of being "lost in the headlights" and 'Hold Me Tight' is a song for his mother. But there's a heartfelt sincerity here that's hugely endearing, which, coupled with graunchy Telecaster vibes and some truly fine songs, could be what puts Ed well ahead of the pack. **JP**

MARTIN SIMPSON

TRAILS AND TRIBULATIONS

WWW.MARTINSIMPSON.COM

Jackson C. Frank's poignant 'Blues Run The Game', a song long a staple in the performances of both the late Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, is a beautiful if haunting introduction to Martin Simpson's album. Too young to have shared their 70s adventures, Simpson now occupies their throne nonetheless. And, as usual, he doesn't disappoint. Gems include 'East Kentucky', a tale of a young lady wearing a "white lily on whose chest I laid my head", Martin's gaunt clattering banjo laying down a spooky backdrop, as Nancy Kerr adds splatters of reedy viola, and his ghostly slide guitar work on the mournful 'St. James Hospital', echoing Blind Willie Johnson's gospel glory. **JP**



PAUL BRADY

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

WWW.PAULBRADY.COM

Paul Brady has always been an enigma. His songs have been covered by Bonnie Raitt and Richard Thompson to name a few and he is rightly regarded as a master songsmith, even eulogised by Dylan. Yet, on the other hand, he remains a nonentity to the proverbial man in the street. A clue perhaps lies in this eclectic album. Brady can easily turn out a slice of Irish Motown with the throbbing 'Say You Don't Mean', as well as the glorious acoustic 'The Cocks Are Crowing', a traditional sounding epic that's an exemplary vehicle for his aching Tyrone vocals. Creatively is a restless spirit, but you can but listen in wonder at a man who's very much at the top of his game. **JP**

TUNDE JEGEDE & DEREK GRIPPER

MALI IN OAK

GLOBEPLAYER.TV/ALBUMS/MALI-IN-OAK

South African guitarist Gripper excels in transferring kora music to classical guitar, and regards Toumani Diabate as the instrument's Segovia. Paired with Jegede, a renaissance man of kora and cello, the results are a synthesis of African and Western classical music. It is a gentle unfolding journey, conjuring visions of shimmering deserts, as the two intertwine in grooves. The empathy between them on tunes like 'Miniyamba' is staggering. Short of visiting the crossroads like Robert Johnson, it's almost incomprehensible how they've done it. **JP**

LITTLE LAPIN

WAKE UP WITH THE SUN

WWW.LITTLELAPINMUSIC.COM

As you'd expect from the title, Cornish singer Lucy Hill's first album is upbeat and full of musical sunshine, which in our occasionally dire times can be no bad thing. Based around her simple acoustic guitar playing, on songs like the gently rollicking 'My Complexion', her voice slides the lyrics together. It's all very Jack Johnson, the kind of stuff you'd enjoy hearing on Fistral Beach watching the sunset with a cold lager. The good time vibe continues with the self explanatory 'Isn't Life For Living' and the urgent 'Need A Change Of Scene'. Hill warbles 'Hold Me Close My Darling' in her ever so winsome voice. It's all very sweet and yes – quite endearing. **JP**

EMILY BARKER
SWEET KIND OF BLUE
WWW.EMILYBARKER.COM

Something of a quantum leap from her work with the Red Clay Halo Band, 'Sweet Kind Of Blue' finds Emily hunkered down in Sam Phillips' legendary studios on Union Avenue Memphis. It's something of a mixed bag. On the greasy funk outing 'Sunrise', Barker pulls out some soul searching vocals over stabbing Hammond organ licks and a chorus line sounding like the girls have just been bussed-in from the local gospel church. But she gets a bit soppy on 'No 5 Hurricane', a sultry piece of folk. It's not until several numbers later, when she lets the band hit their stride again on the jumping 'More' – the bassist hitting a judicious sub Motown line under a honking sax with Barker demanding "I Want Love" – that the album triumphs. **JP**

THE YOUNG 'UNS
STRANGERS
WWW.THEYOUNGUNS.CO.UK

English folk, at its best, still remains one of the last repositories of the 'protest song'. And the subject material here is priceless. The Young 'Uns are a Teeside trio who've garnered the BBC2 Folk Awards 'Best Group' title for two years – and it's easy to see why. As they boisterously holler out the angry words of Maggie Holland's 'A Place Called England', with lyrics "retail park and burger kingdom, run by men who think that England's just a place to park their car" they mean business. There are some great stories here: 'Ghafoor's Bus' tells the tale of the Teeside granddad who drove to Dunkirk serving ten thousand cups of tea a day to refugees, just one of a bunch of remarkably moving songs, performed with almost too much soul to control. **JP**

DOUG SAHM PRESENTS THE TEXAS MAVERICKS
WHO ARE THESE MASKED MEN?

From Willie Nelson to ZZ Top, Texas has a history of coming up with musical characters, some of whom barely ever raise their heads above the parapet. But if you've ever frugged to 'She's About A Mover', then you'll have encountered Doug Sahm. The weirdly titled Sir Douglas Quintet were but a pass note in Sahm's musical career, and this double CD set – one recorded live in Bremen – exposes the breadth of the man's talent. From the wonderful Tex-Mex slouch of 'Mendicino', a floorboard-ripping take of Ritchie Valens' 'La Bamba', and Doug's tongue in cheek unrequited lovesong, 'Give Me Back The Key To My Heart'. Fun music from a band for whom good times were a religion. **JP**

KEITH JAMES
TENDERNESS CLAWS
WWW.KEITH-JAMES.COM/

A consummate covers man, Keith James has built a career performing the songs of Nick Drake, Cat Stevens and Leonard Cohen, and putting the poems of Spanish dissident Garcia Lorca to music. Where he scores is that he's an extremely accomplished guitarist, with an ability to breathe fresh light into material with his imaginative arrangements. Here the poems of Dylan Thomas, Lorca, Alan Ginsberg and others, feature alongside Keith's original material. It's almost hard to believe that they didn't start life as cohesive songs. Keith's vocals are a bit warbly at times, but his dreamy detour into Pete Brown's 'White Room' is a creative highpoint. **JP**

STU LARSEN
RESOLUTE
WWW.STULARSEN.COM

Australian wanderer Stu Larsen likes cutting himself off from distractions. To write this album, he ditched his laptop and iPhone, before holing up in various far flung retreats. And the results are impressive. Stu has one of those subtle malleable voices, ideally suited to the gentle shuffling 'Aeroplanes', a woozy ode to long distance love. And matters of the heart are never far away, even if they happen to be the 1973 Martin D-35 that he sings about in. 'Chicago Song', a guitar heard to good advantage on the wistful 'By The River', which builds slowly over a suspended ethereal keyboard drone. Understated but ultimately very engaging music from the beginning. **JP**

ASHLEY HUTCHINGS
STREET CRIES
WWW.ASHLEYHUTCHINGS.COM

Founding member of Fairport Convention, Ashley Hutchings has a venerated place in the pantheon of English folk rock. Over the decades he's never seemed short of ideas, and for 'Street Cries', he's rewritten twelve traditional songs with contemporary lyrics. There are too many highlights to mention, but particularly noteworthy are 'Damn The Day', which finds Pete Morton on lusty form, singing of a man who robs the Spar rather than the Lord Goldwin of the original, and Dick Gaughan's strident 'Young Henry Martin', the tale of a young car thief instead of a pirate's tale. It's a clever idea, and with the lyrics of the traditional songs included, and a cast of thousands, this is a real treat. **JP**

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CHRIS EATON FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

FRETTING BEHIND THE SLIDE PART 1

Chris shows us how to get the technique of slide-genius Sonny Landreth

Every now and then a player emerges who sets new standards within their genre, raises the game by creating new techniques and vocabulary, a true virtuoso. Eric Clapton talks of the first time he heard Stevie Ray Vaughan, on his car radio. He was so impressed that he had to pull over and listen intently. Sonny Landreth had a similar effect on me: his 1992 album *Outward Bound* was hugely influential. The tones and textures he created with his bottleneck were previously unheard of. His note choices were, for a slide player, somewhat unfathomable. How was he doing that? Was he really playing slide, or was he actually fretting with his fingers? The answer, I discovered, was a combination of both...

Although Landreth is most well-known for electric rock/blues playing, his early albums feature none of those now signature overdriven tones. Blues Attack (1981) and Down in Louisiana (1985) offer crystal clean electric slide and lots of National Resophonic acoustic guitar. I've read about the eureka moment when he first fretted behind his bottleneck... he was tuned to open E major, just like his hero Duane Allman, but his band were at the time playing a minor key blues song. Landreth could see where the minor third note was on his fretboard behind the slide and so he fretted it with his finger while keeping the slide in place. This resulted in a glorious, shimmering minor chord, and the lightbulb went on. From there he ran with it, applying his already impressive finger-picking technique and understanding of music theory. He soon discovered it was possible to form other chords behind the slide, and to play licks that way too. His unique style made him stand out from the crowd and led to many studio sessions and tours working for artists such as John Hiatt, Mark Knopfler and Jerry Douglas.

For my next few columns I'll explore this technique, created by Landreth, which has helped develop the bottleneck vocabulary and offers new compositional options for slide players. It is a progressive technique and therefore requires an understanding of the bottleneck basics. Here's a checklist to help you prepare for successfully trying this style...

Slide master Sonny Landreth

You will need:

- ☐ **Heavier strings than normal (on acoustic guitars I suggest a set of .12's if in standard tuning or .13's or .14's if using dropped open tunings)**
- ☐ **A flat string radius if possible, to accommodate your slide (concave metal slides are available to purchase, which can help with this issue)**
- ☐ **A medium to high action: too low and it will be problematic**
- ☐ **A good right-hand muting technique to block unwanted strings: flat-picking isn't advisable to begin with**
- ☐ **Some experience of wearing a slide, ideally on your fourth finger and accurate intonation**

To help learn the principles involved, we'll stay in standard tuning this month. Essentially what you'll be using the slide as normal but with your first LH finger fretting a note behind the slide, which touches the fretboard but leaves the slide notes still available to play.

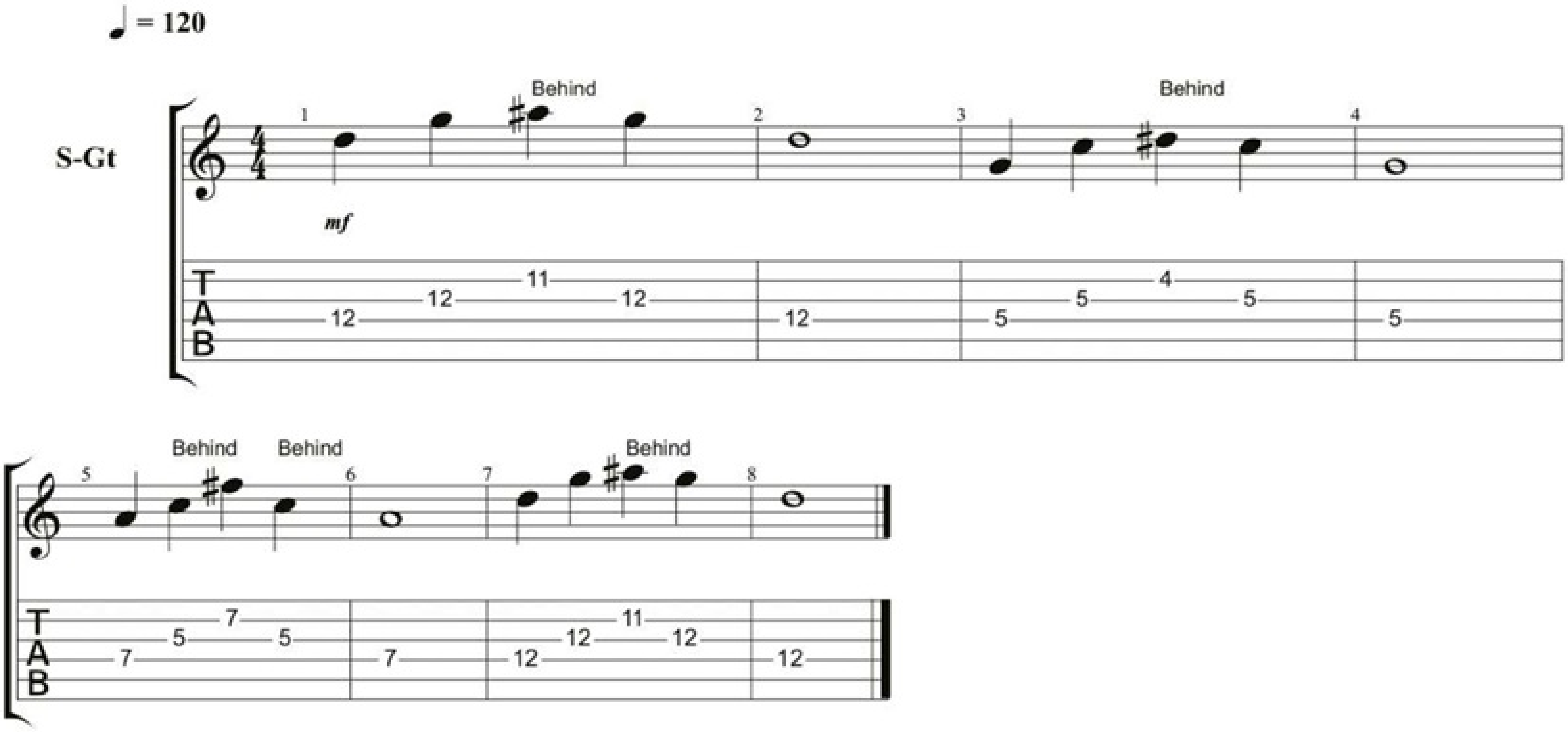
EXAMPLE 1

This is a three-chord trick in Gm. You pick a G major triad using your RH thumb, first and second finger but on the B string fret behind the slide with your first LH finger at the 11th fret, which turns the chord into a minor. Then move that shape to the fifth fret for Cm and then the seventh, but here you move your LH finger up to the G string resulting in a D7 chord. Be careful to keep the slide as still and straight as you can, it doesn't need to cover the fifth or sixth string. Slide movement will result in poor intonation. A snug fitting slide is advisable.

EXAMPLE 2

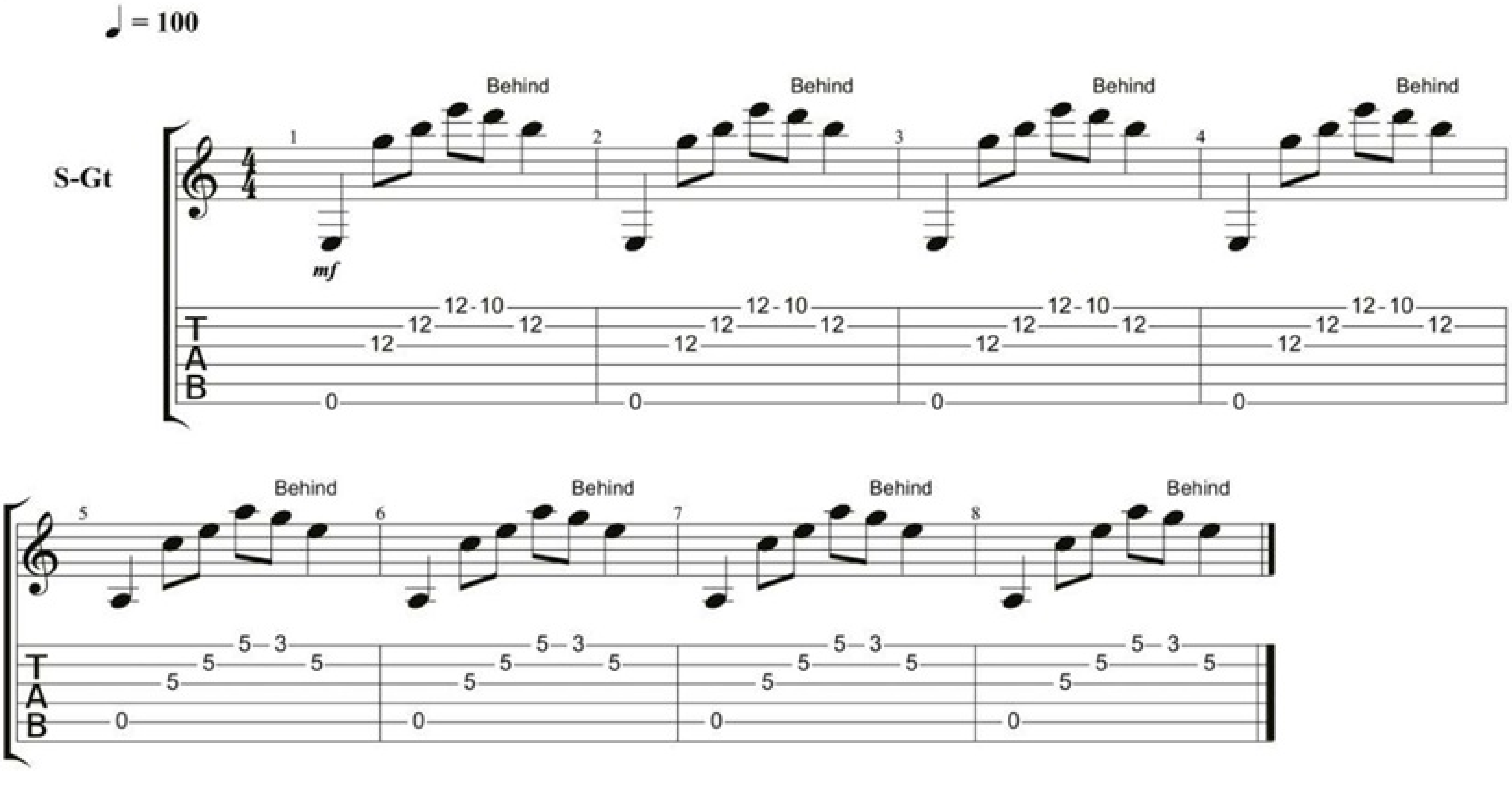
This uses open strings as the root of each chord. The slide only needs to touch the first three strings. You start at the 12th fret with Em which you change to an Em7 by fretting behind at the 10th fret on the first string. Then move this shape to the fifth fret for the Am/Am7. If you're new to this style of sliding you've got plenty to practice with these two exercises. I'll post a video demo on my Instagram page. Refer to my check-list above to help get the fundamentals correct and then keep at it! ■

EXAMPLE 1



> ***"Landreth's unique style made him stand out from the crowd and led to many studio sessions and tours working for artists such as John Hiatt, Mark Knopfler and Jerry Douglas"***

EXAMPLE 2



THOMAS LEEB FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

THE WINDS ARE CHANGING

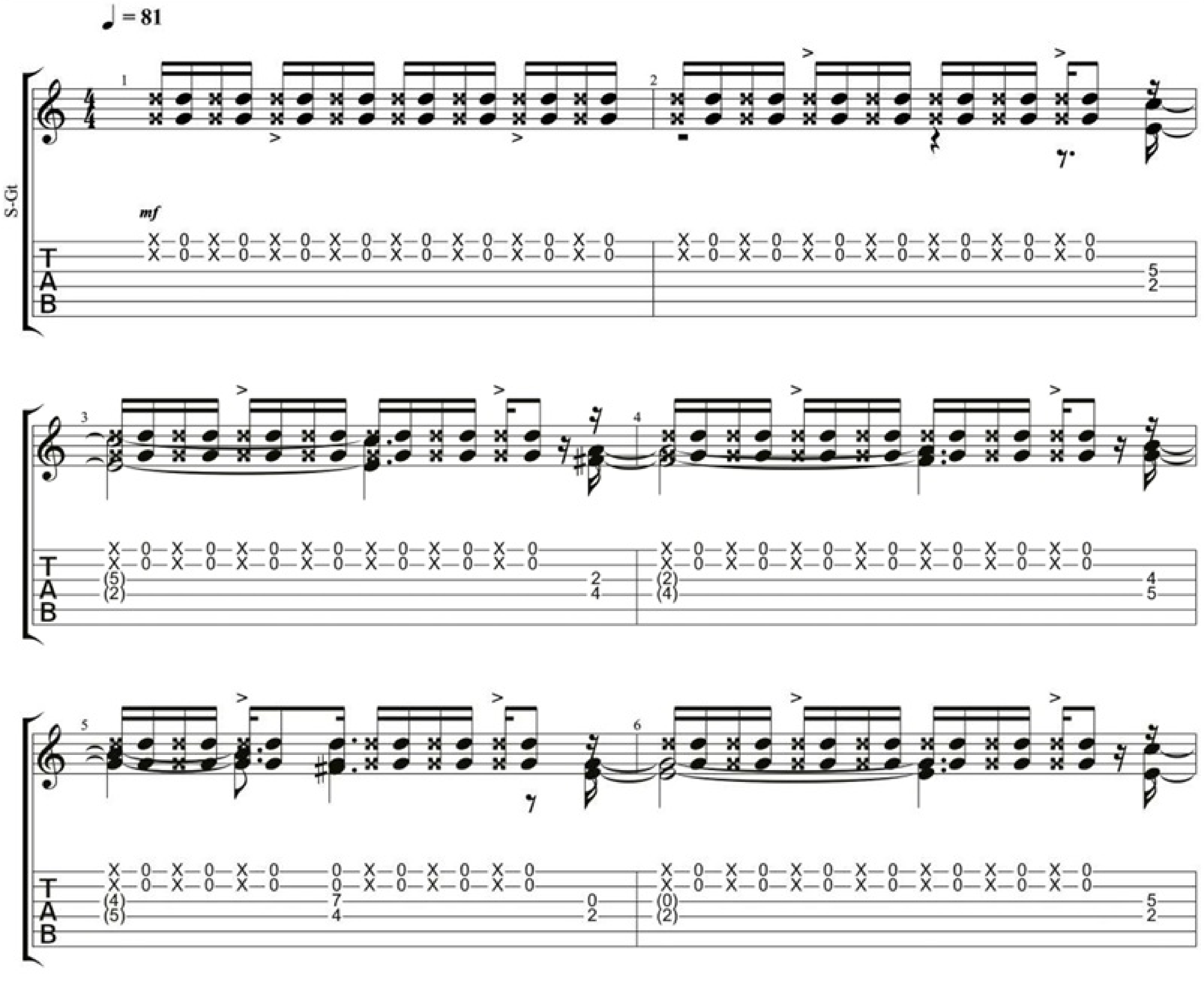
FULL TAB ONLINE

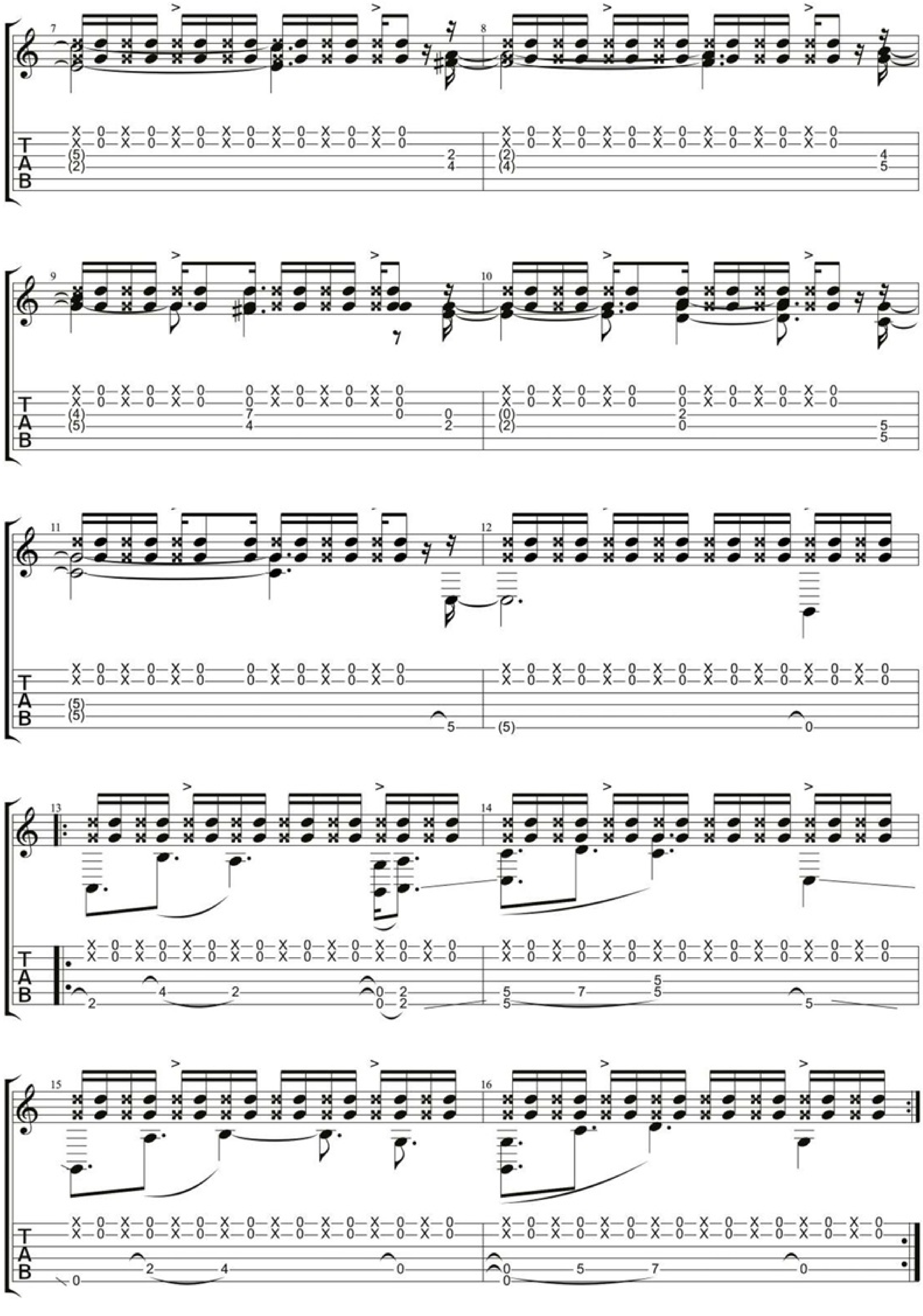
Get practising your hammer-ons and pull-offs with this offbeat piece

This month I'd like to continue to work on my vintage tune called 'Winds are Changing' from my 1999 album *Riddle*. We covered the intro a few issues back and we're taking a look at the outro today. I'm particularly proud of the texture I came up with for this. The backbone of it is a simple offbeat pattern on the top two strings and that is interspersed with picked strings or hammer-on/pull-off combinations in the middle and bass ranges. Let's look at the 'accompaniment' first, before we start putting both parts together. It's a simple repetition: first mute the top two strings and then pick them with index and middle finger. The muting already puts the fingers into position to subsequently pick the open strings. On beats two and four, the mutes are accented by using more force to push the fingers down onto the strings, which results in a high-pitched click. In bar two we will start adding simple two-note chords that move through a neat melody. To pick the middle strings, you simply omit playing the top two strings you'd be playing otherwise. Simple and effective and by no means rocket science, but it definitely does the trick.

The left hand starts hammering away in the bass register in bar 11 while the mute/pick combination continues on top. The hammer-on to fret two is done by tapping the first link of your index finger on the bottom two strings. This facilitates the following hammer-on and pull-off to/from fret four. You'll see exactly the same formula repeated on fret five after the slide there. ■

'THE WINDS ARE CHANGING'





DANIEL HO GRAMMY WINNING UKELELE AND SLACK KEY GUITAR PLAYER

FULL TAB ONLINE

KAI PALAOA (THE WHALE SEA)

Daniel presents a nautical-themed piece

In 2008, I was invited by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to write and perform a Hawaiian slack key guitar piece for Capitol Hill Ocean Week in Washington, D.C.

Ocean conservation was a primary conference topic and I wanted to compose something that addressed this issue. With solo guitar in mind, I hoped to express how we are not always living in harmony with our oceans. To represent this discord, I used the most dissonant interval in music: the half step. But within the context of a chord, the half step can be quite beautiful as it contributes harmonic density and richness. To the contrary, what is the most consonant interval? That's correct – the unison!

"In the context of a chord, the half step can be quite beautiful – contributing harmonic density and richness"

In the Hawaiian language, the name of this composition, 'Kai Palaoa', can loosely be translated as 'The Whale Sea'. During their winter migration from November through May, humpback whales can often be seen off the coast of Maui. I have never swum with whales (dolphins, yes, in Waianae, Hawai'i), so I've only seen their spouts or if lucky enough, when they breach. Like whales coming up for air, the melody of this piece gently rises and falls in the verses, measures 1–22. Then at the start of the bridge, measure 23, and again in measure 27, the whales leap out of the water in a magnificent display.

'Kai Palaoa' is an exploration in dissonance and consonance, in tension and resolution. It is played in the G Kilauea tuning (D, G, C, G, B, E) and uses harmonies that are not really common in either Hawaiian slack key or in standard guitar repertoire.

In measure one, the F# and G notes form a half step interval. Played alone, the strong dissonance of these two notes together might sound almost 'wrong'. But as part of a Gma9 chord, the half step makes the chord sound full. As an experiment, try changing all the F# notes in measure one to G notes. Notice how this G(add9) chord with no third sounds consonant and less full? Hence dissonance, when used effectively, is not always a bad thing!

In measure two, the Eb note on the upbeat of beat two introduces chromaticism, as Eb is not in the key of G. When the phrase rests on beat four, the A melody note against the Eb note forms a tritone, which creates a tension that feels like it needs to resolve. You can take your time on this chord (which is the peak of tension in this four-bar phrase), inviting your audience to experience the inconclusive nature of the tritone. Its tension gradually dissipates over the next two bars, though not completely. The phrase rests on beat four of measure four on a C(add9) chord, which is the IV chord in the key of G.

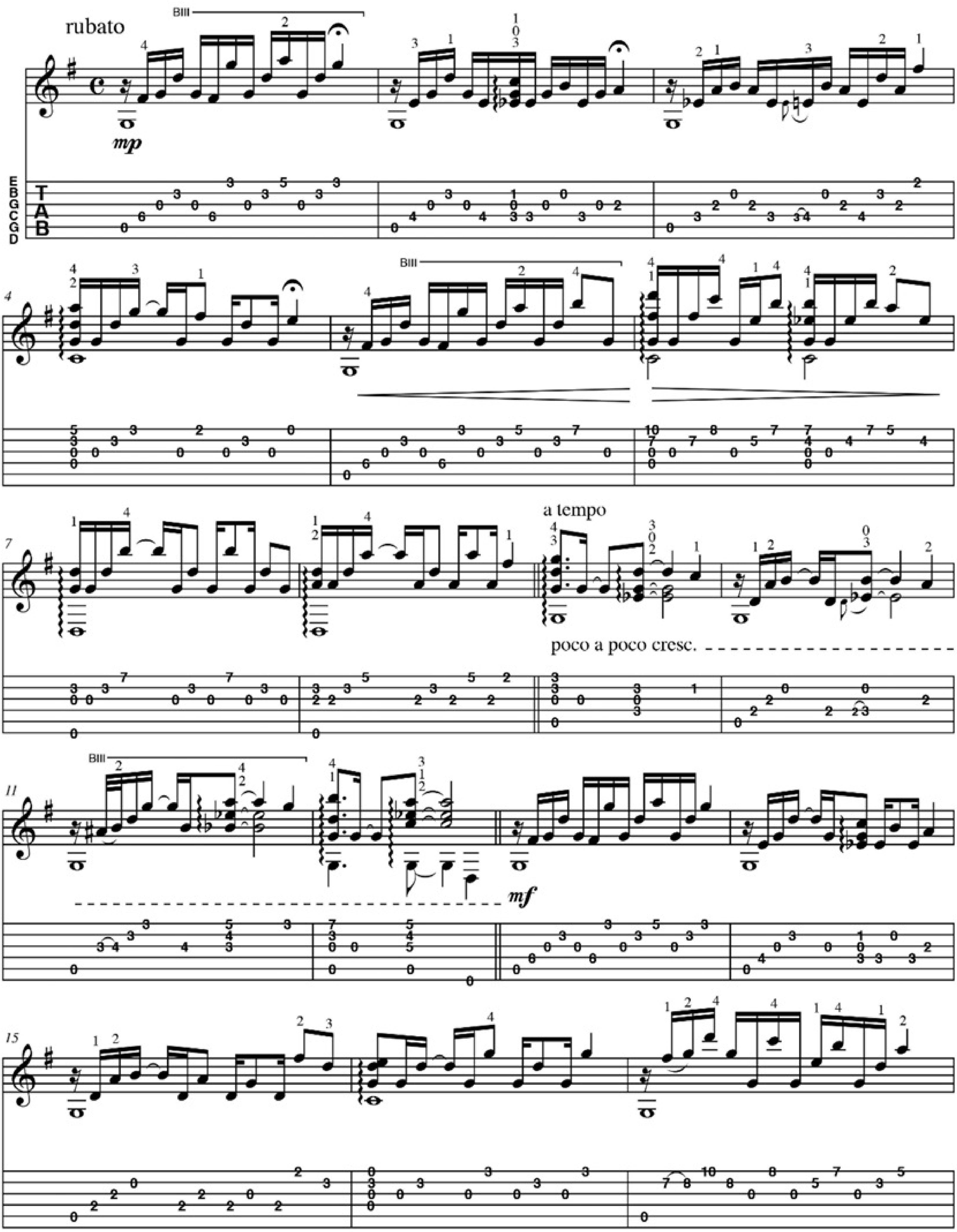
Measures five through eight is a variation of the first four bars, but instead of just touching the surface for a breath of air, the whale peeks out of the water. The upbeats of the second beats in measures nine through 12 use chromatic notes to create tension, which subtly resolves on the fourth beat of each measure. Once again, you can 'lean' (play them a little stronger and hold them a bit longer) on these chords on the upbeats of beat two before resolving them on beat four. Sometimes notes outside of a key's scale can sound wrong at first. Playing them deliberately shows conviction and intent.

The second verse, measures 13 through 22, can be performed similarly to the first verse, just a little stronger and in rhythm. This section builds to the bridge, which begins at measure 23. The high D melody note on the downbeat of measure 23 represents a whale breaching. The melody gradually descends over the next four bars, then breaches again on the downbeat of measure 27. It descends to measure 30, which is a variation of measures nine through 12.

I play Kai Palaoa at almost every concert: it's one of my favorite pieces to perform. Over the years, I've been playing it slower and slower, allowing the chords to ring out. A slower tempo emphasizes the transitions between dissonance and consonance, and lets the audience feel its tension and resolution. When playing these extended chords, it helps to have a guitar that has accurate intonation all the way up the fretboard. So, on your next whale watching trip, maybe these guitar parts and the concept of living in harmony with the sea and marine life will resonate with you, too. ■

Watch a video of Kai Palaoa at https://goo.gl/bXuia3. Kai Palaoa is from Daniel Ho's original Hawaiian album *Aukahi* (Flowing Harmony). Available on iTunes and at www.DanielHo.com

KAI PALAOA (THE WHALE SEA)



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CLIVE CARROLL ACOUSTIC VIRTUOSO

PIOBAIREACHD

Clive undertakes the tricky but satisfying challenge of mimicking complex bagpipe ornaments on the guitar

I hope you enjoyed my previous article, 'Sitting in the Pocket', covering 'groove' within the parameters of the 2/2 or 4/4 signature. We'll do more with that in future so for now, keep those exercises on the back-burner! This time I've offered up something rather unusual: a piece called, 'Piobaireachd' (pronounced something along the lines of 'piibrock') from my eight-part 'Scottish Suite' for guitar.

What in the name of MacCrimmon is a 'Piobaireachd'? Well, this Scottish Gaelic word translates as 'pipe music' or 'pipe playing'. It is also called 'ceòl mòr' which means big, or art music. There is nothing in the musical world quite like it. It is unique to the Scottish Highlands. As I mentioned, the music printed here is by yours truly. In other words, it will never be filed under 'Traditional Scottish' – only heavily inspired by it.

How 'Piobaireachd' works: in general, your local highland piper with a wealth of life experience and expert technical skill will begin with a poetic 'ùrlar' (an uncomplicated melodic theme) after which he or she will play several variations that include changes of time and progressively more complex ornaments such as the 'taorluath', 'crunluath' and 'edre' as this classical music of the Highlands unfolds. The 'ùrlar' we heard a good while back is played once more in conclusion. Make sense? OK, you might like to head to YouTube and check out a piece such as 'Lament for the Earl of Dunmore' if you've got a spare 11 or 12 minutes to take in this wonderful stuff.

> **"There's nothing in the musical world quite like Piobaireachd"**

So, how does all of this relate to the music printed here? As well as it being a bite-sized introduction into the world of this mysterious music, I have undertaken a tad more than a short study of the ornamentation involved. Although they sound magnificent on the bagpipes, playing the same notes on six strings is a nightmare! Even your local shred-metal guitar slinger might surrender. The guitar doesn't 'speak' as quickly as the pipes so I have attempted to emulate the sound of the ornaments in a guitar-friendly way. As they say, what could possibly go wrong?

It's in standard tuning and the piece is in B. The pitch of the Highland bagpipes is usually a few cents lower than B so if you want to sound even more authentic… The key of B works rather well on a guitar in standard tuning because the root, when played in the bass, can alternate with the sub-dominant low E. Very Gaelic, like you're playing in an open tuning. Indeed, guitarists from the audience sometimes come up to me afterwards and say 'Clive, it sounds like you're playing in an open tuning'… Let's move on…

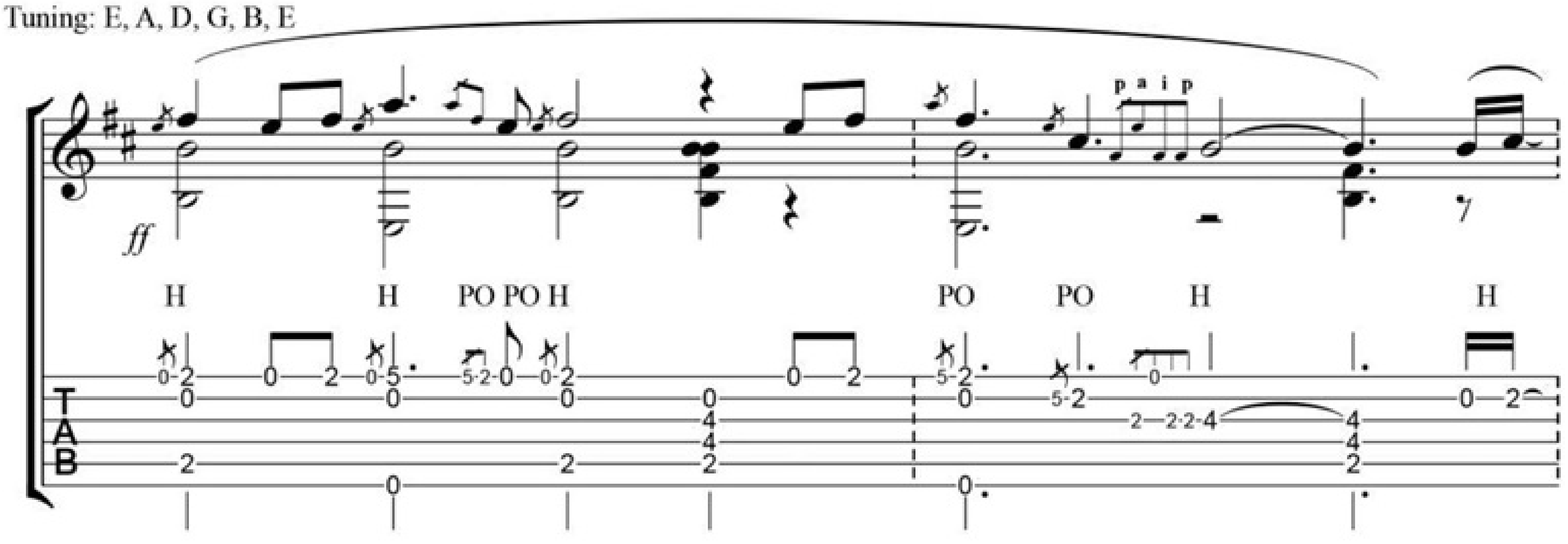
The fretwork here isn't too much of a challenge. There are lots of open strings and no barre chords. There are also no bar lines(!) Instead, all the melodic material is held together with sweeping phrase marks above the staff notation. The main challenge for the fretting hand is to 'hammer on' and 'pull off' quickly and cleanly. If they're too laid back the resulting sound may be more Muddy Waters than Loch Broom. The only tricky fragment for the picking hand appears towards the end of the first phrase and again just before the final chord. Fingerings are marked and don't forget that at the end of this fragment the A to B, or, frets two to four on string three in the tablature, is a hammer-on. Practice slowly!

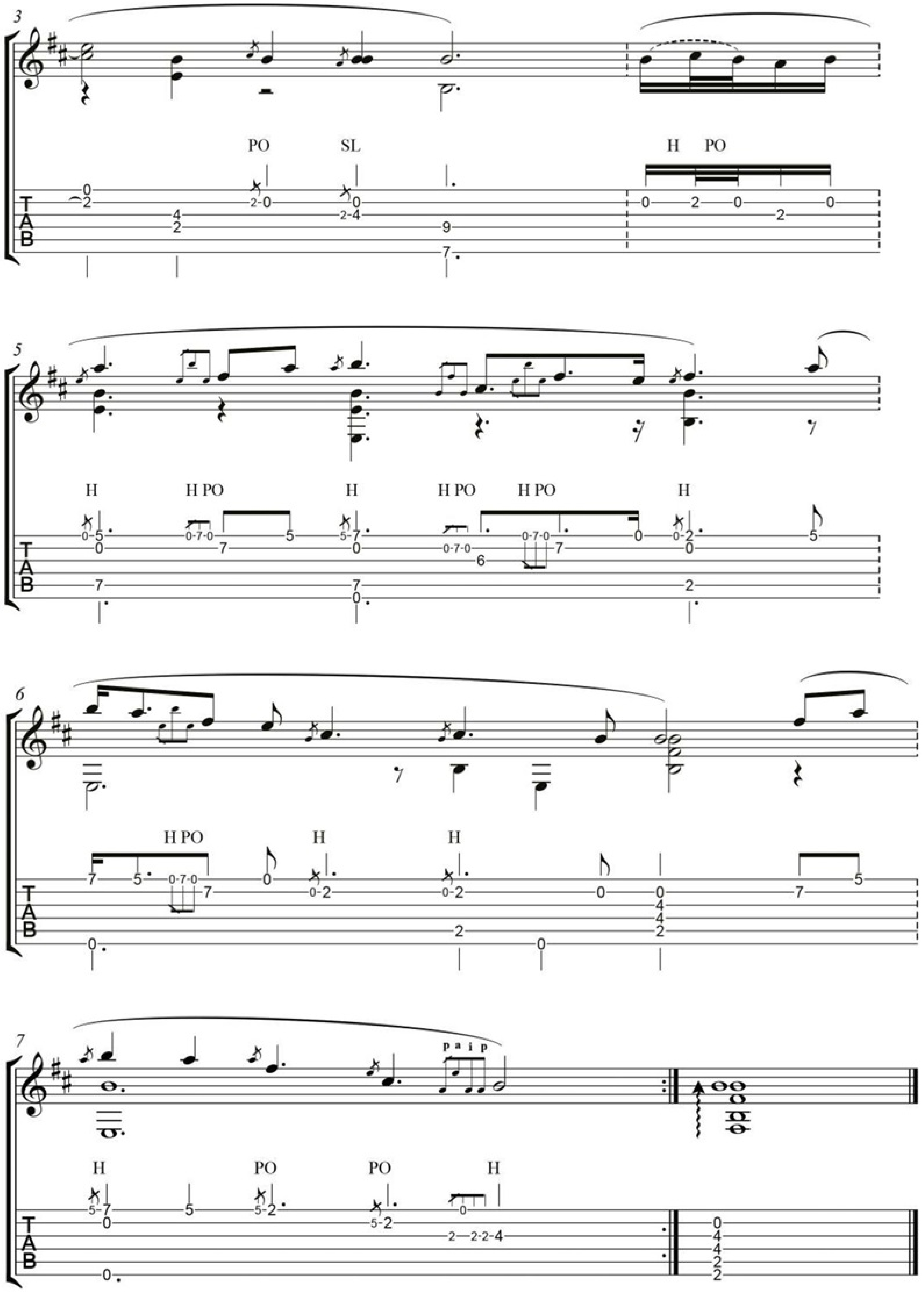
You can listen to 'Piobaireachd' online at: www.clivecarroll.co.uk

'PIOBAIREACHD' – CLIVE CARROLL

Free Time
Chords spread throughout

Tuning: E, A, D, G, B, E

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LEON HUNT UK BANJO EXPERT

MAYCOMB COUNTY BLUES

Leon introduces a banjo piece in which mastery of dynamics is key

Several years back, I was commissioned by The New Vic to write the soundtrack for an 'in the round' production of Harper Lee's classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What a great gig that was! The imagery conjured up by the text made the job of writing music to support the story satisfying and refreshingly easy. As is often the case with soundtracks, many of the cues were multiple variations of a single motif: A jolly version, a faster version for more frenetic scenes, a darker version and more. However, one of the principal motifs was separated into just two distinct flavours: 'Maycomb County Breakdown', a cheerful, upbeat tune in a major key, and 'Maycomb County Blues' with a lazier, darker, almost 'Paris, Texas' type vibe. I was reminded of the latter recently when a student requested we work through it. I thought I'd share it with you.

Before getting stuck into the tab, it'll really help if you can get the feel for how the tune sounds, as dynamics play a big part in the piece's overall effect. Have a good listen to the version I've put on Soundcloud (https://goo.gl/XgLM4r). If this isn't an option, just set your metronome to around 83 BPM and conjure up some dusty images of 1930s rural Alabama. Being quite bluesy, as the name suggests, this tune has its fair share of choking (string bending). Mostly this will be quite subtle so don't go mad, just add some tension here and there to create some depth to the music.

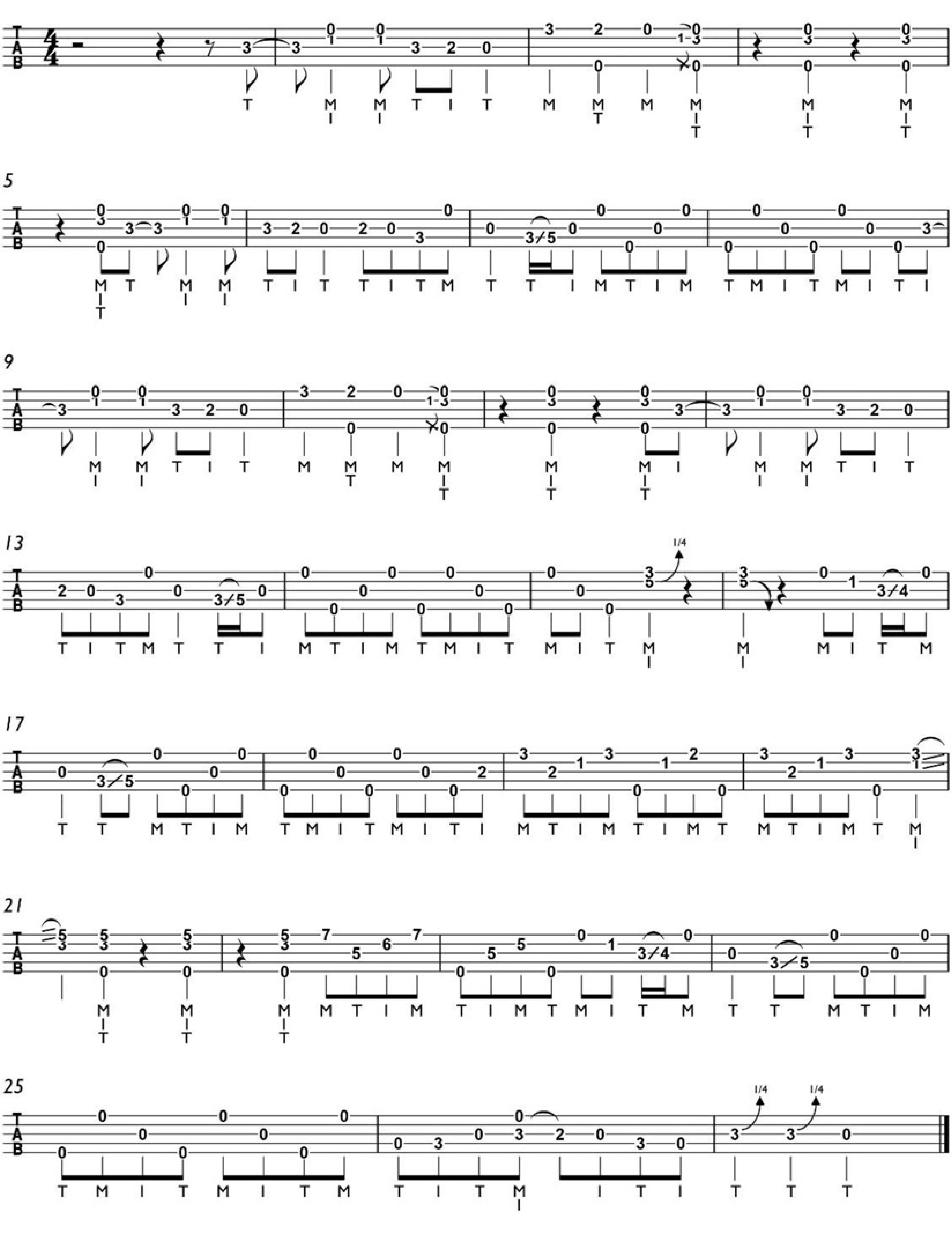
The tune opens with a gentle choke on the third string at the third fret. This happens a few times throughout the piece: put the work in here and get it sounding effortlessly clean, it'll stand you in good stead for the rest of the tune. Right after the choke there are a couple of pinches on the first and second strings. Again, there are lots of these so get them sounding smooth, with the strings picked perfectly in sync and the music will benefit hugely. As this is a relatively slow piece of music you don't need to be quite as strict with the 'alternating thumb and index fingers' on the right hand through the single string passages as usual. That said, don't just leave it to chance. Find the right-hand picking pattern that's most comfortable to you and then hardwire them into your muscle memory with lots of repetition.

The 'B section' starts with a semitone choke on the second string at the fifth fret. Not only will this take a fair amount of strength from your ring finger, you'll need to be very accurate with it too. This is because you're choking to bring the note up to the same pitch as the note you just played simultaneously on the first string. Get this wrong and it'll sound terrible. Get it right and you'll be a hero (relatively speaking).

Once the notes are in your fingers it's time to get busy with the dynamics. Without full execution of the dynamics, a tune like this will sound characterless. Get a feel for drawing a clean, gentle tone from your banjo. This will not only give a lovely, delicate sound (not heard enough from banjo players) but will give you plenty of headroom to punch out the notes you want to promote. ■

Leon was tasked with creating music for a stage version of *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

'MAYCOMB COUNTY BLUES'



CHRIS WOODS CONTEMPORARY ACOUSTIC GROOVE PLAYER

SEEING SOUNDS

Listen with your eyes! Chris Woods asks us to get back to basics with this fun inspiration-stimulating exercise

In today's column we're going to be creating musical pictures. Music is an undoubtedly visual thing; whether its a song or epic instrumental, most sounds conjure pictures. Sometimes composers have deliberately tried to depict something and other times those 'mind images' are a bit more accidental. Composing to a pre-prepared image is a great way to develop your playing and all round creativity. It can really help to bring together all those wonderful chords, melodies, textures and techniques you've been building since you picked up your first six-string.

This month I've composed two very short pieces that represent two simple images. The first is painting the picture of 'rain' and the second is simply 'after the rain'. I know it's oozing with cliché, but sometimes working from the obvious is the best place to start. These ideas are as always meant to be a stimulus for you to use, you could simply enjoy them as they are or take some of the concepts and develop your own. All the examples are kept relatively simple so you should be able to access them without the need to read the notation. Enjoy!

EXAMPLE 1 – 'RAIN'

I started by 'noodling' – that's where I always start. Eventually I stumbled across a handful of chord shapes that reflected the slightly sombre yet reflective feel of rainfall. This was based around E minor to create that sombreness – and, importantly, lots of open strings to create mystical and reflective tones. The chords have insane titles as a result, but please remember they are simply shapes that I have discovered or stumbled upon, rather than theoretically created – so don't get hung up names and theory just enjoy the sounds.

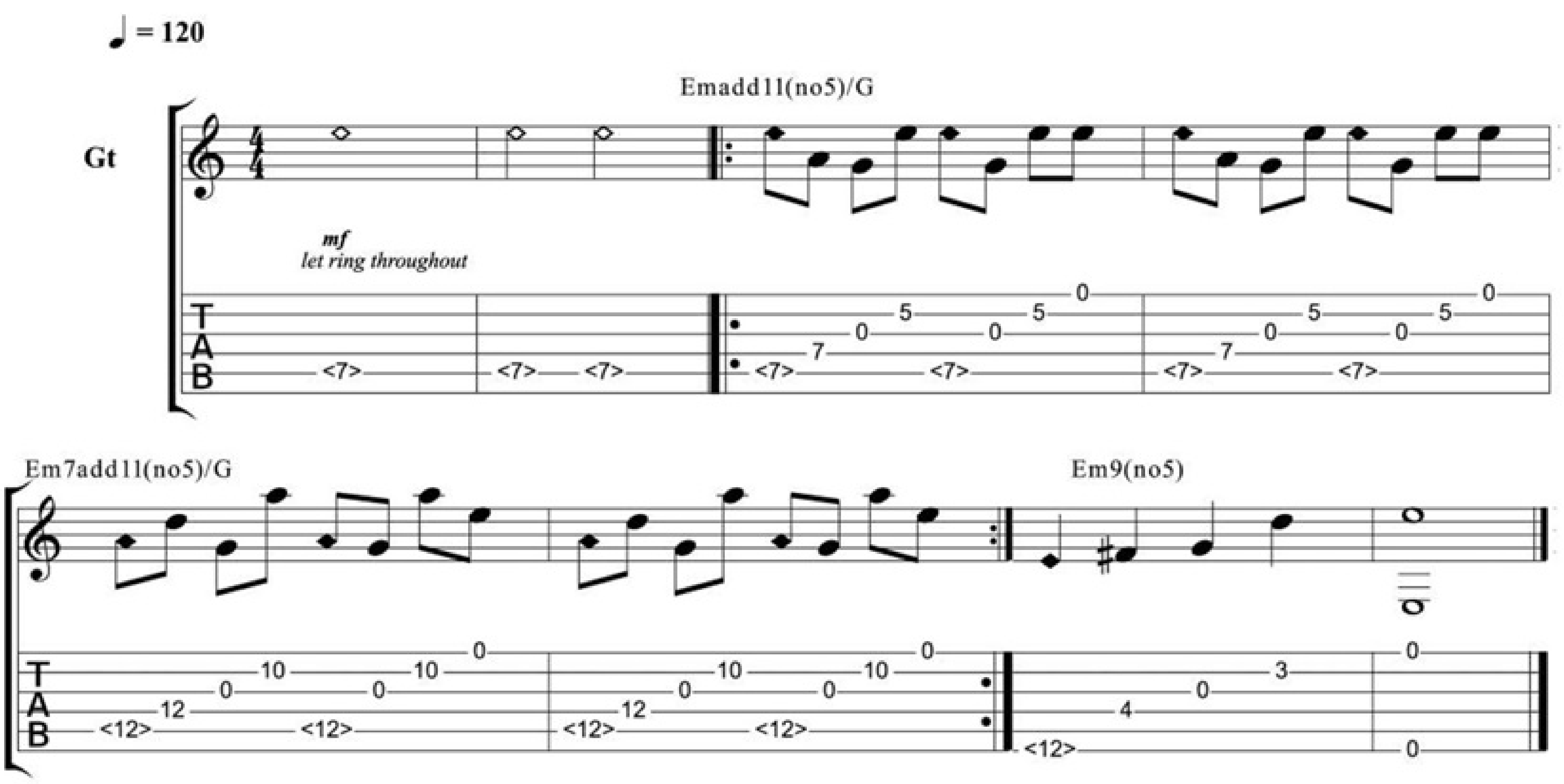
Before each arpeggio'd chord is a natural harmonic, this is played with your little finger on your fretting hand, while holding down the chord. The harmonics are sparkly and brimming with attack which helps create that literal image of a 'pitter patter' of rain.

EXAMPLE 2 – 'AFTER THE RAIN'

Post rainfall there is always a refreshing feel in the air, a sense of relief and, without wanting to sound too over-emotional, a feeling of hope. With that in mind the chords I have chosen are built around E major. They work their way up the fretboard creating a sense of lift. Importantly I have also chosen a 3/4 time signature. A waltz! Why? Well the feel of 3/4 to me is positive, delicate, uplifting and light. For me it helps create the picture we want.

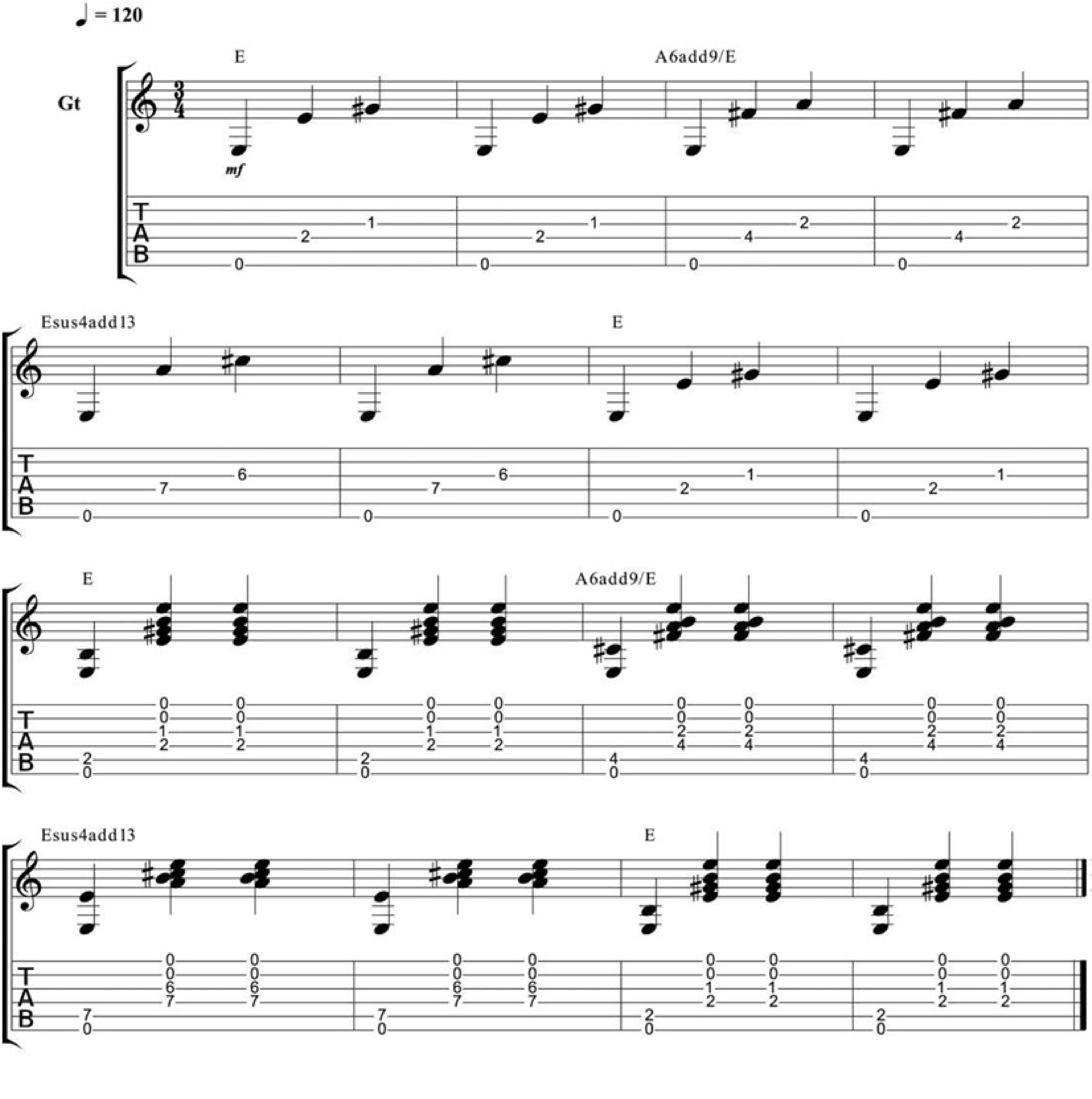
Importantly we begin with a very simplistic arpeggio and develop into a simple and steady strum. Therefore, everything about this example is focused on developing, progressing; it's hopeful. ■

EXAMPLE 1 'RAIN'



"Composing to a pre-prepared image is a great way to develop your playing and all round creativity. It can really help to bring together all those wonderful chords, melodies, textures and techniques you've been building since you picked up your first six-string"

EXAMPLE 2 'AFTER THE RAIN'



Neil Young may have received a lukewarm response when After the Gold Rush came out, but we know who had the last laugh...

Barely six months after Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young topped the Billboard charts with *Deja Vu*, Neil Young released his third solo album, *After the Gold Rush*, on September 19, 1970. And while the much-hyped *Deja Vu* earned massive critical acclaim, *After the Gold Rush* received a mixed reaction initially.

Langdon Winner wrote in *Rolling Stone* at the time: "Neil Young devotees will probably spend the next few weeks trying desperately to convince themselves that *After the Gold Rush* is good music. But they'll be kidding themselves... none of the songs here rise above the uniformly dull surface. In my listening, the problem appears to be that most of this music was simply not ready to be recorded at the time of the sessions."

Time has been kind to the album, however. Now considered a masterpiece, *After the Gold Rush* was also a landmark record. It was rated the 71st and 80th greatest album of all time by *Rolling Stone* and *NME* respectively in 2003. In 1998, *Q* magazine readers voted it the 89th greatest album of all time and a 2005 survey by Channel 4 to determine the 100 greatest albums ranked it 92nd.

After Young split from Buffalo Springfield to release his self-titled debut solo album on November 12, 1968 – his 23rd birthday – he began the first of many career u-turns. In 1969, Young plugged-in with Crazy Horse for the abrasive *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*. The following year, he sacked the band and returned to his acoustic country-folk roots with *After the Gold Rush*. Young did, however, retain some songs that he laid down earlier in the year with Crazy Horse at Sunset Sound Studios, Hollywood, before retreating to his basement studio in Topanga Canyon, California, to record the majority of the album.

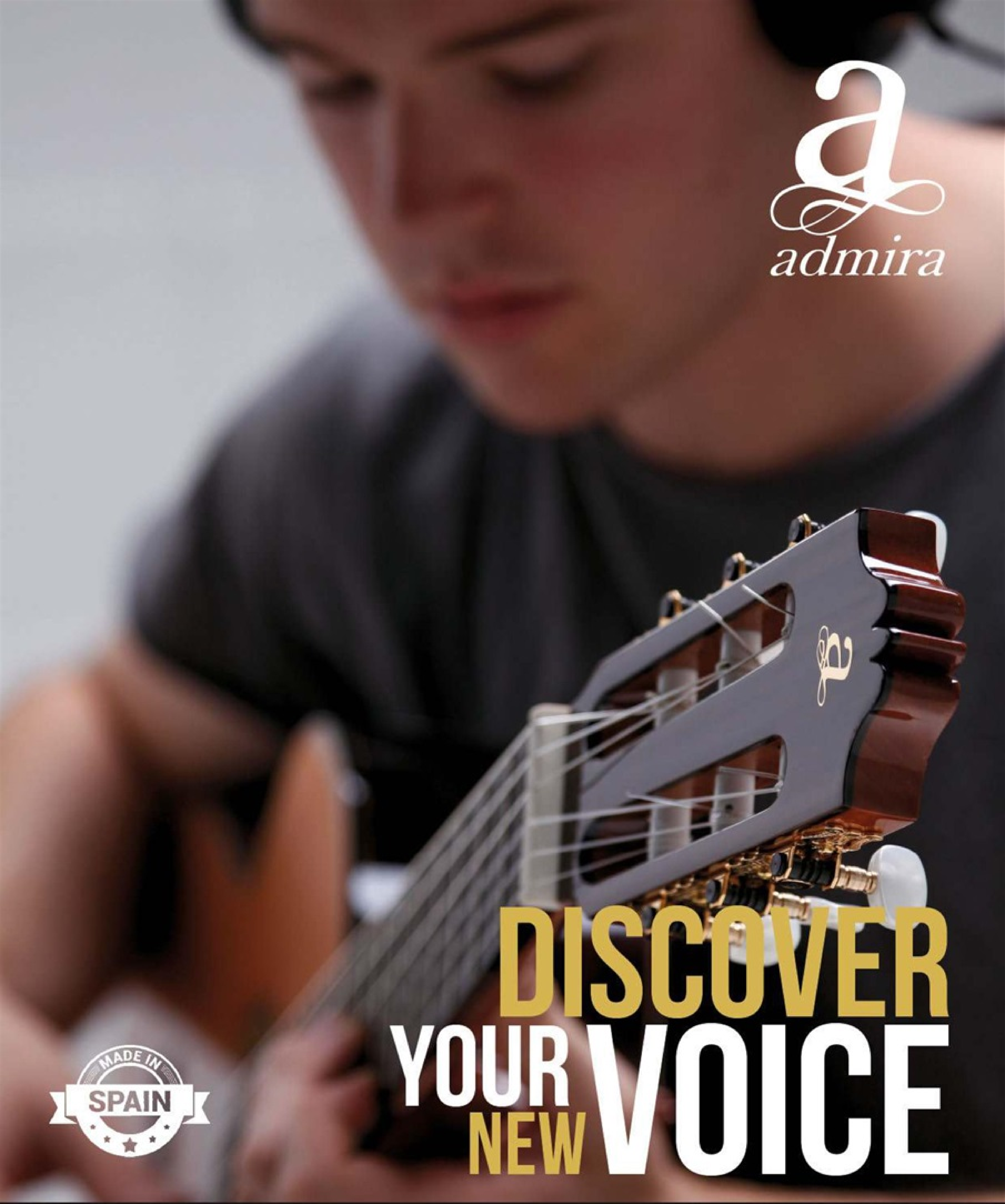
For *After the Gold Rush*, Young enlisted the help of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young bassist Greg Reeves, Crazy Horse drummer Ralph Molina and young musical prodigy Nils Lofgren on piano. The delicate nature of the songs recorded in Young's basement juxtapose the numbers from the Crazy Horse sessions excellently, or disjointedly, depending on your preference.

After The Gold Rush produced two charting singles: 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart' – written after Graham Nash's breakup with Joni Mitchell, the song became Young's first Top 40 hit as a solo artist – and 'When You Dance I Can Really Love'. The singles reached number 33 and 93, respectively. The opener 'Tell Me Why' immediately marks a shift from the previous hard-rocking album into singer-songwriter territory; laying the foundations for 1972 album, *Harvest*, which would become Young's only No. 1 album.

It was the controversial 'Southern Man' that garnered Young the most attention, though. The track shed light on the racism experienced by blacks in the Deep South, and prompted much repugnance from Southerners during a time of desegregation.

Some songs on the album were inspired by the Dean Stockwell-Herb Bermann screenplay for the unmade film *After the Gold Rush*. Young had read the screenplay and asked Stockwell if he could produce the soundtrack. Tracks that Young recalls as being written specifically for the film are 'After the Gold Rush' and 'Cripple Creek Ferry'. While the script has long been lost, it was apparently an end-of-the-world movie.

After the Gold Rush became Young's first Top 10 album, making it to No. 8 in the Billboard charts. The album, which eventually sold more than two million copies, remains one of Young's greatest works; perfectly summarising his career up that point and signalling what would come further down the road – laying the foundations for the truly magnificent *Harvest*. ■



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